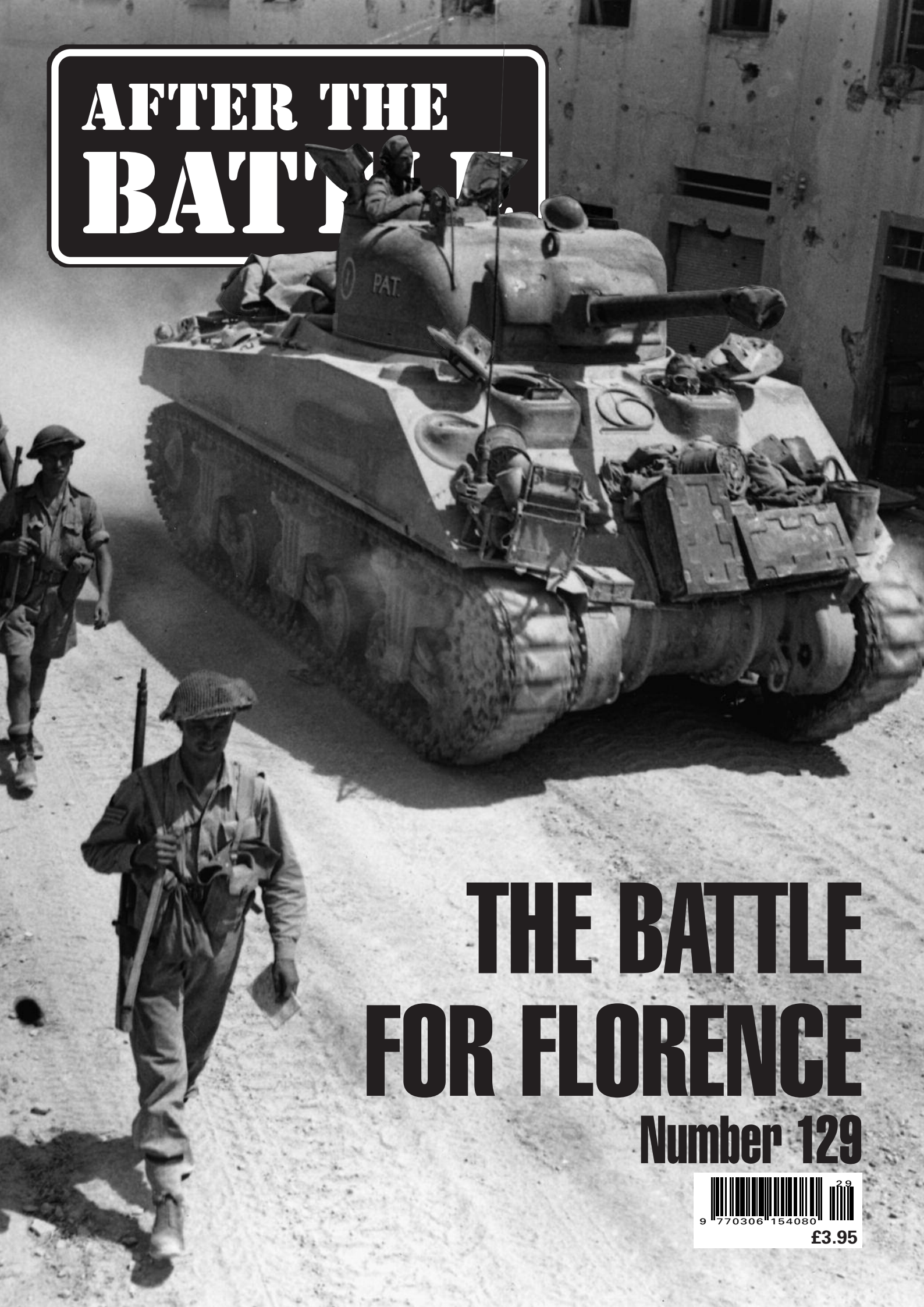

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Front Cover: South African tanks and infantry passing through Impruneta on August 3, 1944 during the advance on Florence. (IWM)

Centre Pages: The centre of Florence showing the zone evacuated by order of the Germans on July 29, 1944 and the area surrounding the Ponte Vecchio bridge destroyed by German demolitions on the night of August 3/4. (NIOD)

Back Cover: The National World War II memorial in Washington, DC.

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In mid-July 1944, the British Eighth Army in Italy launched its XIII Corps in a major drive on Florence, the Renaissance city on the Arno river in the Tuscany region, the objective being to gain the city and the river line. With the German divisions offering fierce resistance in the hills to the south of Florence, the drive evolved into a hard-fought campaign that lasted for three weeks. In the end the 6th South African Armoured Division entered Florence early on August 4, just a few hours before the 2nd New Zealand Division. (IWM)

Following the fall of Rome on June 4, 1944 the Allies made rapid progress up the Tiber valley in pursuit of the Germans. This led General Sir Harold Alexander, the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in Italy, to believe that the enemy was not strong enough to hold the Gothic Line — the defence line which the Germans were constructing in the Apennine mountains north of Florence — against a powerful Allied attack and, as such, he was hoping to push over the northern Apennines with the view to mounting a full-scale attack on Bologna no later than August 15. Once established there, the Allies would be able to exploit westwards into France or north-east towards Austria. Thus he ordered the two armies under his command — the US Fifth Army under Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark on the left and the British Eighth Army under Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese on the right — to drive on as rapidly as possible, their initial objective being to gain the line of the Arno river. This river, which flows westward through Florence and on to the Ligurian Sea, formed the last major barrier before the northern Apennines.

Alexander's German adversary, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, the Oberbefehlshaber Südwest (Commander-in-Chief South-West) and commander of Heeresgruppe C in Italy, for his part, proposed a fighting withdrawal towards the Gothic Line (which the Germans themselves called the Green Line) but Hitler, fearing Kesselring might want to fall back to this position without offering serious resistance, demanded that he resume defensive operations as far south of the Apennines as possible.

Under Kesselring's command were the 14. Armee, commanded by Generaloberst Joachim Lemelsen, which opposed the US Fifth Army, and the 10. Armee, led by Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, which confronted the Eighth Army. Faced with Hitler's directive, Kesselring ordered his two generals to make phased withdrawals, making stands at a series of intermediate defence lines and delaying the enemy as much as possible. West of the Apennine mountain range, their final delaying position would be the line of the Arno river — the same water barrier which the Allies hoped to gain before the advent of autumn.

FLORENCE DECLARED AN 'OPEN CITY'

Florence, the great Renaissance city, in 1944 had a population of some 290,000. World-renowned for its artistic and cultural treasures and architectural monuments, it was also an important road and rail centre and, with its many bridges over the Arno, a vital asset to the supply lines of any army. As the war drew inexorably closer during the summer, every Florentine citizen wondered whether the Germans or the Allies would fight for the city.

Whatever worries existed on the Italian side, it was clear that the German high command was well aware of the cultural value of the city. Already in May 1944, Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, the chief of the OKW-Wehrmachtsführungsstab (Armed Forces Operational Staff), had written in a reply to Nicholas Comnène, a retired Rumanian diplomat residing in Florence, who had expressed his anxiety over what awaited the city: 'Since enemy terror raids on cities in central and upper Italy have shown an increase, the Führer has ordered an immediate evacuation of all non-essential military offices from the city, the preservation of which Germany regards as one of the prime obligations of European culture. The Wehrmacht units still remaining in the city consist almost exclusively of field hospitals set up outside the city centre. Please be assured that the Wehrmacht will continue to do everything within its powers to prevent any endangering of the city.' However, despite this reassuring tone, Jodl ended his letter with a note of warning: 'Nevertheless I am not convinced that the enemy air forces will stop at Florence, even when there is not a single German soldier there.'

That day, Captain Gade of the Army Film and Photo Unit (AFPU), who had arrived in Florence with the first Allied troops, climbed the tower of the Santo Spirito Church on the south bank of the Arno and from there photographed the central part of the city. On the left in this shot is the magnificent dome of the Duomo Cathedral and on the right the elegant bell tower of the Palazzo Vecchio with the squat form of the Orsanmichele Church in between. Smoke can be seen still rising up from ruined palazzos and houses along the Via Por Santa Maria, the result of German demolitions carried out the previous night to block access to the Ponte Vecchio. Spared on Hitler's express orders and the only bridge not blown by them, the famous structure with its overhanging shops is visible above the houses on the far right. (IWM)

THE BATTLE FOR FLORENCE

By Jeffrey Plowman

The basic decision on what to do with Florence had been taken by Hitler on June 3, in conjunction with a decision on Rome. With the fall of the Italian capital imminent, Hitler had directed that Rome and Florence were to be declared 'open cities' in order to spare their priceless monuments and works of art.

Der Chef des Wehrmachtführungsstabes
im Oberkommando der Wehrmacht

P.H.Qu., den 12. Mai 1944.

Betrifft: Schutz von Florenz.

An
Seine Exzellenz
Herrn N.F. Commédne
Florenz
Villa Machiavelli

Exzellenz !

Mit der Beantwortung Ihres an den Führer gerichteten Schreibens vom 25.3.1944 beauftragt, beehre ich mich, Ihnen folgendes mitzuteilen:

Seit sich ein verstärkter feindlicher Luftterror auf die Städte Mittel- und Oberitaliens abzeichnet, hat der Führer in dem Bestreben, keine Vorsichtsmassnahme zum Schutz der Stadt Florenz ausser Acht zu lassen, deren Erhaltung Deutschland als eines der vornehmsten Gebote der europäischen Kultur ansieht, alsbald eine Räumung der Stadt von allen dort entbehrlichen deutschen militärischen Dienststellen befohlen. Es ist Vorsorge getroffen worden, dass bei Überprüfung der Notwendigkeit eines Verbleibens in Florenz ein ungewöhnlich scharfer Massstab angelegt wird. Darüber hinaus ist innerhalb der Deutschen Wehrmacht auch der Besuch der Stadt Florenz bis auf gänzlich unbedeutende Ausnahmefälle grundsätzlich verboten worden. Schliesslich hat die Deutsche Wehrmacht sogar die ausserordentlich starke Belastung einer Sperrung der Stadt für den militärischen Durchgangsverkehr und dessen Umleitung auf wenig günstige Umgehungsstrassen in Kauf genommen.

- 2 -

Generaloberst Jodl's letter of May 12, 1944, in which he expressed Germany's concern for the safety of Florence and its cultural and artistic treasures.

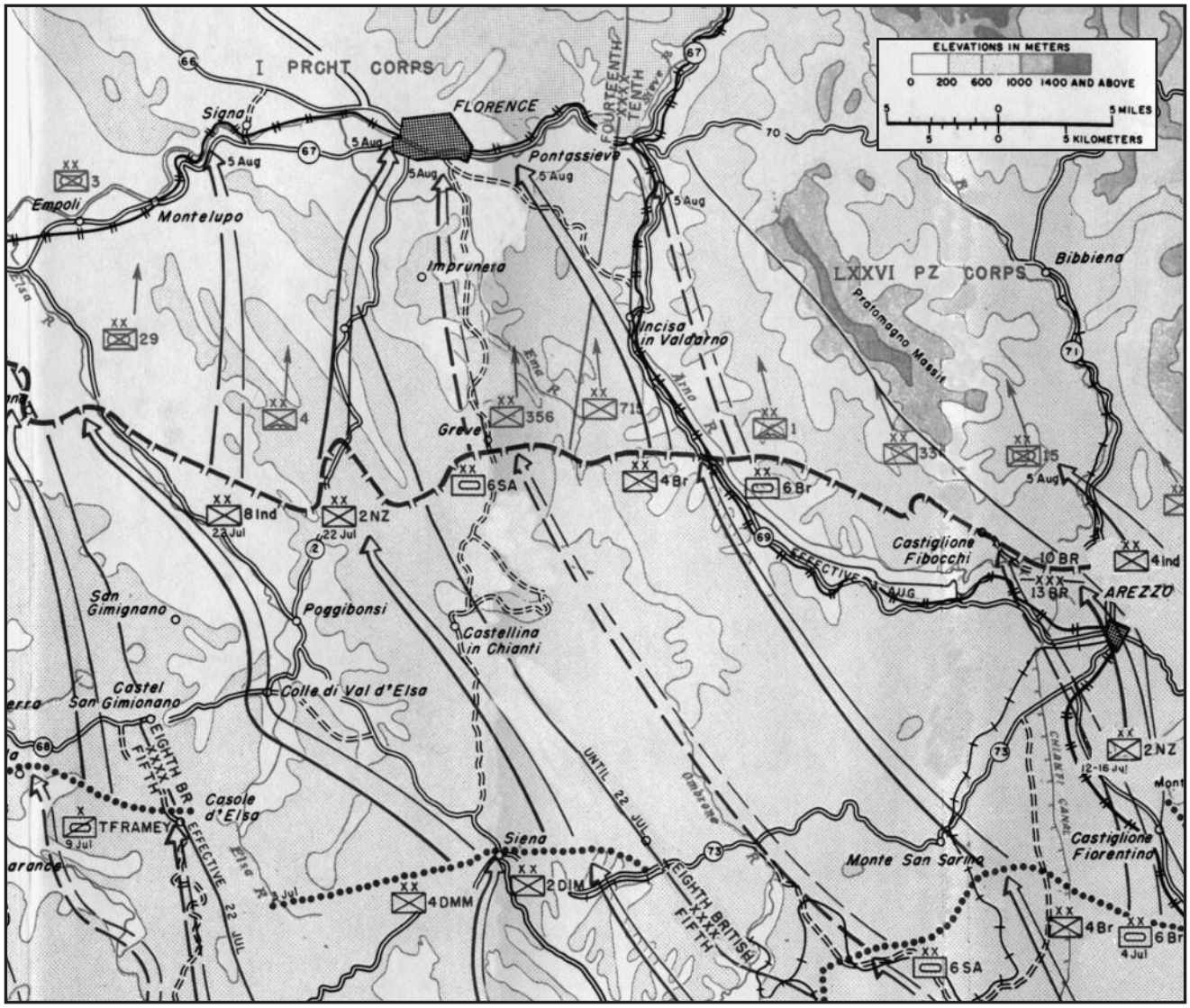
The status of 'open city' meant that the Germans would not defend a city nor fight for its possession. All German civil and military headquarters were to move out of it and any movement of military convoys through it was forbidden. Demolition of rail and road bridges over the main rivers was prohibited. The message that a city had been declared 'open' was to be passed through neutral channels to the Allies, calling on them to do the same. Everyone on the German side realised that taking cities like Rome and Florence out of the military plans would considerably hamper operations but this had to be accepted.

On June 23 Kesselring, in line with Hitler's instructions, designated Florence an open city and ordered his army commanders to exclude all but internal security personnel from it. Like had been done with Rome, this information was communicated indirectly through Vatican channels to the Allied command. His decision had presented Kesselring with a critical dilemma. He had given orders that Florence (and also the town of Pisa further to the west) were to be spared but at the same time he had ordered his army commanders to make the Allies fight for every inch of ground between the Arno and the Northern Apennines. The orders were obviously inherently contradictory, since Florence, especially was the key to the Arno position.

Although the Germans adhered to their own unilateral declaration about Florence, they were not sure whether the Allies would similarly accept the city's non-military status. In their view, the Allies had certainly not respected the 'open' status of Rome, having used the unblown Tiber bridges in the city to give their armoured forces a speedy transfer to the north. Also, on June 12, Allied aircraft had dropped leaflets on Florence, calling upon the civilian population to evacuate the city as air bombardments would follow within a few days.

The Allies, for their part, were equally anxious to spare Florence and avoid fighting within the historic city. However, as in the case of Rome, General Alexander declined to issue a declaration to the effect that he accepted Florence as an open city. He harboured no doubts that Kesselring would contest every yard of defensible ground south of the city, and possibly within it, until forced to withdraw.

As the front approached Florence, the Germans faced growing difficulties in keeping the civilian population supplied with food, which had to be trucked from as far away as the Lombard plain, 50 miles to the north. The 14. Armee, in whose zone the city lay, was itself plagued by a shortage of transport and could spare few trucks to assist the hungry Florentines. It was therefore not surprising that, as the front came near, the German garrison faced mounting hostility from the population. However, Generaloberst Lemelsen forbade any retaliations unless civilians engaged in hostile acts, such as guiding Allied troops or informing them about German positions. In such cases, he did not shrink from strong punitive measures, including, in one case, the execution of 26 civilians.



The XIII Corps offensive started out on July 17 with the 6th South African Armoured Division on the left, the British 4th Infantry Division in the centre and the British 6th Armoured Division on the right. However, with the widening of XIII Corps' sector by 15 miles on July 22 (due to the inter-army boundary with the US Fifth Army being moved westwards), the main effort was switched to the left. The 8th Indian and 2nd New Zealand Divisions were brought in on that wing, the main thrusts to Florence now being entrusted to the New Zealand Division and the South African Armoured Division.

ALLIED PLANS FOR THE DRIVE ON FLORENCE

By mid-July the US Fifth Army, advancing along the Ligurian coast, had captured the port city of Leghorn and pushed the right wing of the 14. Armee behind the Arno river. The British Eighth Army, advancing on either side of the Apennines, had captured the city of Arezzo, an important road and rail centre on the west side of the mountains, 40 miles south-east of Florence, and captured the port city of Ancona on the Adriatic coast. Fearing an Allied breakthrough along the Adriatic, the 10. Armee began shifting units from the inland sector to the coast.

Despite the heavy battles behind it, the Eight Army's inland wing continued its northward drive without any real pause. After the fall of Arezzo on July 16, the two corps on that wing, British X and XIII Corps, found themselves divided, the former advancing east of the great mountain mass of the Pratomagno, while the latter wheeled north-west towards Florence.

Seeing that the terrain in front of his corps was divided by the Chianti Mountains — a range of steep, thickly wooded hills, peaks and ridges stretching north-west to Florence — the commander of XIII Corps, Lieutenant-General Sir Sidney Kirkman, planned to develop two strong armoured thrusts towards Florence. On the right, the British 6th Armoured Division was to advance down the valley of the Middle Arno, along the east bank of the river, while on the left the 6th South African Armoured Division was to launch its attack across the western slopes of the Chianti Mountains following Route 222 along the axis of the towns of Radda, Greve and Impruneta. The British 4th Infantry Division, supported by the 1st Canadian Tank Brigade, was to clear the area in between — from the Middle Arno to the eastern side of the Chianti Mountains — using Route 69 as its main axis. In corps reserve, Kirkman had the 2nd New Zealand Division, the 8th Indian Division (taken over from X Corps) and the British 25th Tank Brigade.

THE GERMANS OPPOSITE XIII CORPS

On the German side, the Chianti Mountains formed the boundary between the 14. Armee and the 10. Armee. This meant that the XIII Corps' advance would be opposed by formations from both German armies. The South African Division on the left would come up against units of the I. Fallschirm-Korps of the 14. Armee while the 4th Infantry and 6th Armoured Divisions on the right would meet units of the LXXVI. Panzerkorps of the 10. Armee. Commanding the I. Fallschirm-Korps was Generalleutnant Alfred Schlemm. In the lines, from west to east, he had the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division, the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division and the 356. Infanterie-Division backed up by Tigers of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 508. The LXXVI. Panzerkorps was led by Generalleutnant Traugott Herr and his lines, again from west to east, were manned by the Fallschirm-Panzer-Division 'Hermann Göring' (in the process of being relieved by the 715. Infanterie-Division), the 1. Fallschirmjäger-Division, the 334. Infanterie-Division and a regiment of the 15. Panzergrenadier-Division.

In the hills south of Florence, commensurate with Kesselring's order for a phased withdrawal, Schlemm and Herr had established a series of map lines leading back to the main defence position along the Arno river. In Herr's sector, these were the 'Irmgard' Line, blocking the valley of the Middle Arno 20 miles south-east of Florence, and the 'Karin' and 'Lydia' Lines, barring the same valley 11 and 14 miles further back respectively. In Schlemm's sector, on the other side of the Chianti Mountains, there were the 'Olga' Line, blocking Routes 2 and 222 nine miles south of Florence, and the 'Paula' Line blocking the same roads three miles closer to the city.

XIII CORPS STARTS THE OFFENSIVE (JULY 17-20)

On July 17, one day after the fall of Arezzo, XIII Corps began its drive on Florence. From Arezzo, the 6th Armoured Division (Major-General Vyvyan Evelegh) started a thrust along the east bank of the Middle Arno, making for the town of Castiglion Fibocchi. West of the river, the 4th Division (Major-General Dudley Ward), supported by tanks of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, set off northwards across the hills towards Montevarchi, which they entered on the 18th. Both divisions soon came up against the 'Irmgard' positions of the LXXVI. Panzerkorps, which were strongly defended. The 6th Armoured Division, stopped by the 1 Fallschirmjäger-Division (Generalmajor Richard Heidrich), sent some tanks across the Arno at Laterina but could make no progress on the west bank either. The 4th Division was stopped by Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 of the Fallschirm-Panzer-Division 'Hermann Göring' (Generalleutnant Wilhelm Schmalz), which was holding Ricasoli, a mountain village on a rocky ridge overlooking Route 69 north-west of Montevarchi.

The advance by the 6th South African Armoured Division (Major-General W. H. Evered Poole) further to the west was a little more successful. The division advanced with its two infantry brigades up, the 12th Motorised Brigade astride the road and the British 24th Guards Brigade (permanently attached to the South African Armoured Division since May 1944) protecting its right flank along the western slopes of the Chianti Mountains. The Germans opposing them — elements of the 356. Infanterie-Division (Generalleutnant Karl Faulenbach) of the I. Fallschirm-Korps — broke contact on the morning of July 16, enabling the division to press forward over demolished roads and through numerous minefields to the town of Radda, which they entered late on the 17th. Here the Germans halted them for a day.

However, advances by the French Expeditionary Corps (part of the US Fifth Army) in the west forced the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division (Generalmajor Heinrich Trettner) to withdraw from the vicinity of Poggibonsi, necessitating the 356. Infanterie-Division to also pull back from around Radda. Thus on July 18 the South African Division was able to resume its advance through more minefields and around road demolitions towards the highest ridges of the Chianti range along the road to Greve. The 5th Grenadier Guards of the Guards Brigade, supported by the tanks of the Pretoria Regiment, took Monte Maione (812 metres) — the contact point between the 14. and 10. Armee and held by the latter's 715. Infanterie-Division (Generalmajor Hanns von Rohr) — during a surprise march on the night of July 18/19. The Witwatersrand/De La Rey Regiment of the South African 12th Brigade took the next ridge, Monte Querciabella (845 metres), the following day, and the 1st Scots Guards went on to capture Monte San Michele (892 metres), due east of Greve, on the 20th. The division had now captured the highest points in the Chianti Mountains from which the ground sloped steadily down to the Lower Arno valley and Florence. (From Monte San Michele, the tanks of the Pretoria Regiment were able to fire down into the valley of the Middle Arno, forcing the Germans to abandon their positions on the Ricasoli ridge and enabling the neighbouring 4th Division to push on.)

On July 19, while these battles were going on, Kesselring flew to East Prussia for a one-day conference with Hitler at his Wolfsschanze Führerhauptquartier, returning to Italy the same day. At this meeting, Hitler reaffirmed his decision that Florence was to be left out of operations. He forbade Kesselring to blow up the city's bridges over the Arno, which he considered should be spared due to their great historic and artistic value. There was to be no fighting inside the city. Instead, he instructed Kesselring to hold the last stop line south of the city — this was the 'Paula' Line — for as long as possible. Then, when the time had come to withdraw all troops behind the Arno, the river line was to be held — except at Florence itself. Here the line would loop around the part of the city that lies on the north bank, leaving the whole city to fall into enemy hands undamaged.

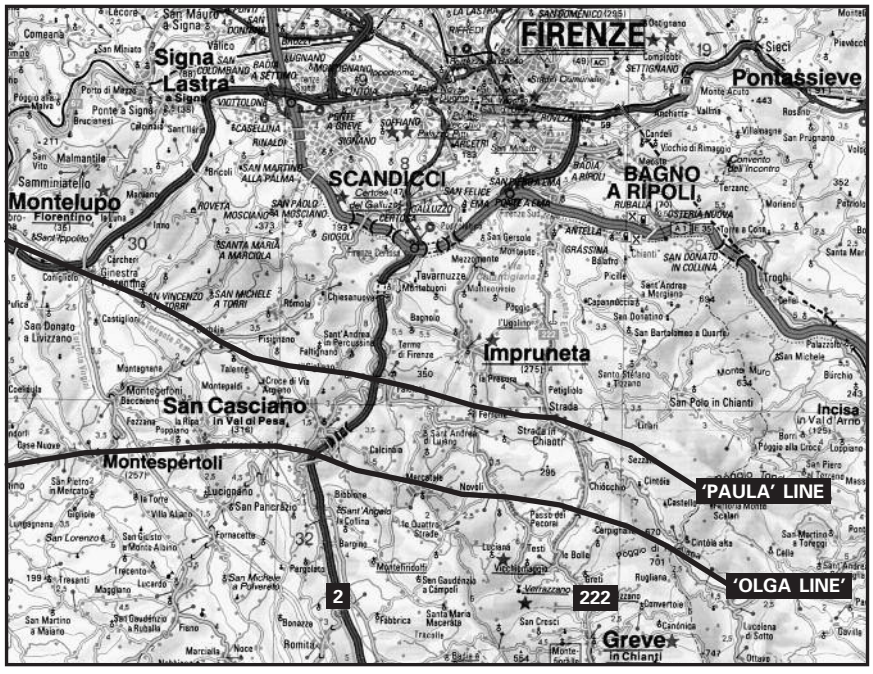
On his return Kesselring, in accord with Hitler's orders, issued instructions for the I. Fallschirm-Korps to hold the 'Paula' Line 'for some time'. At the same time he authorised von Vietinghoff to extract the 1. Fallschirmjäger-Division from the LXXVI. Panzerkorps front and transfer it to the Adriatic coast to counter the renewed Eighth Army push there. Realising this weakened the line in the sector of the inter-army boundary and increased the risk of an enemy breakthrough to Florence, he ordered the 90. Panzergrenadier-Division, which had already withdrawn behind the Arno in the 14. Armee sector, to assemble north of Florence as army group reserve.

XIII CORPS' MAIN ATTACK SHIFTED WESTWARD

Meanwhile, on the Allied side, it had become clear to General Kirkman that German opposition in the Middle Arno valley was much stronger than in the area west of the Chianti Mountains. In the Arno valley, the corps' advance had come to a virtual standstill, particularly east of Route 69, where the 6th Armoured Division found its path blocked by two and a half divisions between the river and the great barrier of the Pratomagno massif. By contrast, resistance in the area west of the Chianti Mountains appeared much lighter.

The Allied drive on Florence coincided with the withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps, which was destined for Operation 'Anvil', the landings in southern France (see *After the Battle* No. 110). Their departure shifted the Eighth Army inter-army boundary westward and extended the XIII Corps sector by 15 miles. This widening of his sector opened up a whole new approach to Florence for Kirkman west of the Chianti Mountains, namely along Route 2 running from Poggibonsi via San Casciano to Florence. It was a region of rolling hills and many secondary roads but according to intelligence reports not as strongly defended as the Arno valley. Defending the sector were the 356. Infanterie-Division, facing the South Africans; the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division, in position astride Route 2, and the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division in the hills further west.

On July 20, Kirkman decided to shift his corps' main effort to that flank and began moving there the 8th Indian Division and the 2nd New Zealand Division from his reserve. The 8th Indian Division (Major-General Dudley Russell), with the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade in support, was to operate on the corps' left flank, aiming for the towns of Empoli and Montelupo, 20 miles west of Florence. The 2nd New Zealand Division (Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg) was brought into the line between them and the South African Armoured Division and charged with attacking north up Route 2 towards San Casciano and ultimately to the Arno crossings at Signa, five miles west of Florence. On their right, the South Africans were to make a parallel advance up Route 222 from Radda via the towns of Greve and Impruneta to Florence itself. The two divisions east of the Chianti Mountains became the secondary effort. The 4th Division, now supported by the British 25th Tank Brigade, was to advance towards Pontasieve and cross the Arno at Poggio Alberaccio, seven miles east of Florence. The British 6th Armoured Division was to continue to operate on the right flank as opportunity offered. It would require two weeks of heavy fighting but from this point onwards it was clear that Florence would be taken by either the 6th South African Armoured Division or the 2nd New Zealand Division.



The Germans had established two defence lines in the hills south of Florence and west of the Chianti Mountains, to be used as intermediate delaying positions prior to a withdrawal behind the Arno. These lines were not connected areas of fortified or even dug-in positions but merely lines drawn on a map on the basis of terrain study. The first was the 'Olga' Line, nine miles south of Florence, which ran from Montespertoli eastwards through San Casciano to Mercatale, thus blocking both Routes 2 and 222. The second was the 'Paula' Line, six miles from Florence, which ran from Montelupo eastwards past San Michele, La Romola, Impruneta and Strada to Monte Scalari.

Right: **On July 21/22 the New Zealand Division began its attack along Route 2 to Florence. They experienced their first setback on the second day when the 23rd Battalion and tanks of the 18th Armoured Regiment ran up against a German strong point at Villa Strada, two miles north of Tavarnelle. This Tiger from schwere Panzer-Abteilung 508, engaged by the 18th Armoured Regiment, was abandoned among an olive grove within sight of the Villa Strada. In the fading light the New Zealanders did not realise this and they did not discover the enemy tank until the following day. (R. M. Gourdie)**

THE DRIVE TO THE 'OLGA' LINE (JULY 22-28)

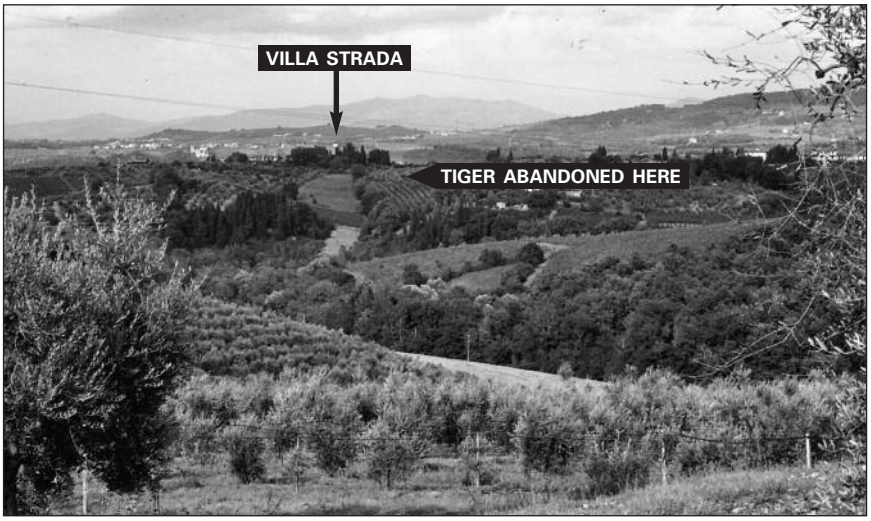
The 2nd New Zealand Division comprised the 4th Armoured Brigade (with the 18th, 19th and 20th Armoured Regiments, equipped with Sherman tanks, and the 22nd Motor Battalion), the 5th Infantry Brigade (with the 21st, 23rd and 28th Maori Battalions) and the 6th Infantry Brigade (with the 24th, 25th and 26th Battalions). The divisional recce unit was the 2nd NZ Divisional Cavalry Regiment, equipped with Staghound armoured cars.

The division began its attack on a one-brigade front. On the night of July 21/22 the 5th Brigade took over the front of the 2ème Division d'Infanterie Marocaine astride Route 2. The following day their attack kicked off with the 23rd Battalion and the 28th Maori Battalion on their left, pushing northwards towards the village of Tavarnelle, which was secured early on the morning of July 23.

The first serious check occurred later that same day north of Tavarnelle. Here the tanks of A Squadron of the 18th Armoured Regiment and the 23rd Battalion ran up against the first of the characteristic villas of the area, the Villa Strada, which because of its crenellated tower would acquire the nickname 'The Castle'. The squadron had its first casualty when one tank was hit and burned, too quickly for the crew to escape, the shellfire coming from the vicinity of 'The Castle'. The attack soon ground to a halt and it became apparent that 'The Castle' and its grounds were thick with German infantry — it was in fact an outpost of the German 'Olga' Line — and it was later discovered that they were backed up by four Mark IV tanks or self-propelled guns. The intensity of the fire coming from this strong point was such that movement forward became impossible and the assault ground to a halt.

Later, in what was to be a formative moment for the New Zealand armour, B Squadron, 18th Armoured Regiment, and 28th Maori Battalion, operating on a parallel road to the west, flushed a Tiger from a cemetery near the Villa Bonazza. In a very short time two tanks were hit and on fire, while a third was hit but managed to withdraw. In the meantime the Tiger made its escape down a gully, coming under increasing fire from the New Zealand tanks, though it was unable to elevate its gun sufficiently to return the fire. It eventually received sufficient damage to force its crew to abandon it in a maize field close to the Villa Strada and blow it up, though in the falling light this was not immediately apparent to the New Zealanders.

Sixty years later it is almost impossible to obtain a good comparison due to the growth of the olive trees. In 2000 it was still possible to see the tower of the Villa Strada (today known as the Villa Moris) above the trees to the right. New Zealanders visiting the area would probably get a better welcome than the soldiers got in 1944, as it is currently a bed and breakfast guest-house. (Rowe)



Right: **Villa Strada as seen from the opposite ridge near the village of Bonazza where the tanks of the 18th Armoured Regiment were stationed. This view gives a good idea of the extreme range from which the Sherman crews were operating. The Villa Strada is just behind the cluster of trees in the centre and the Tiger was abandoned in the olive grove to the right of the open field in front it. (Plowman)**

Right: **On July 25 and four miles further on, the New Zealand Division was halted at San Casciano, held by the Germans as part of their 'Olga' Line, the first of I. Fallschirm-Korps' delaying positions south of Florence. Here, a Sherman of the New Zealand 4th Armoured Brigade has taken up position on the main road just south of the town to give supporting fire to the infantry. The picture was taken by AFPU photographer Sergeant Menzies. (IWM)**

On the New Zealanders' right, still facing the German 356. Infanterie-Division, the South African Division found resistance stiffening against them as they advanced towards Greve on Route 222, being engaged in heavy fighting on either side of the town. To the south-east, the 3rd Coldstream Guards were involved in a bitter struggle over the wind-exposed summit of Monte Domini (892 metres), finally securing it with the support of a troop of Pretoria Regiment tanks by the evening of July 23. Next, the 5th Grenadier Guards won a succession of lower peaks — baptised 'Grenadier Ridge' — carrying the battle beyond Greve to reach Monte Collegalle (341 metres) on July 25.

On the other side of the Greve river valley the Witwatersrand/De La Rey Regiment, supported by tanks of the Prince Alfred's Guard, took Monte Fili (554 metres), two miles due west of Greve, on the morning of the 23rd, finally securing possession of that town and its bridge. In a continuation of this push, and deviating westward from Route 222 toward Route 2, the Imperial Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment overran a strong German position two miles south of the small town of Mercatale on the 24th. But there the Germans counter-attacked with armoured support (including Tiger tanks) and checked the advance. The same happened with the Grenadier Guards at Monte Collegalle on the other side of the valley. The South African Division had run up against the German 'Olga' Line.

Meanwhile, on the left of the South Africans, the New Zealand Division continued its northward drive along Route 2. Benefiting from a limited withdrawal by the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division during the night of July 24/25, the 5th Brigade advanced to within a few miles of the town of San Casciano, drawing level with the South Africans in the process. West of the highway, the 21st and 25th Battalions, supported by armour, pushed on towards the town of Montespertoli and the village of Poppiano early on July 25. However, both here and at San Casciano, the division was stopped at the 'Olga' Line.

The same spot on Route 2, the main road between Siena and Florence, better known since Roman times as the Via Cassia. The houses on the ridge on the left stand along a secondary road leading out of town to San Pancrazio. (Biscarini)

In his morning report to OKW of the 26th, Kesselring praised the powers of resistance and discipline shown by Schlemm's divisions in the blistering July heat, against an enemy with overwhelming superiority in artillery and air support. Lemelsen confirmed that the morale of the I. Fallschirm-Korps had been raised by its defensive successes but stressed that numbers were seriously depleted by casualties and heat exhaustion**.** Schlemm was authorised to retire into the 'Paula' Line during the night of July 26/27.

Left: **The next day, the Germans abandoned the 'Olga' Line, allowing the 22nd Motor Battalion to enter the town unopposed. New Zealand Army photographer George Kaye pictured a carrier moving along one of the streets. (ATL)** *Right:* **Most of the comparisons for this story were taken by Perry Rowe from Dunedin, New Zealand, who during April-May 2004 traced the entire route of the New Zealand Division (in which his grandfather, Private Keith Brandon, had served as a medic in the 24th Battalion) from Taranto to Venice. After fruitlessly exploring the southern end of San Casciano, Perry eventually spotted this match while leaning out of his hotel window! The carrier was in the Via Roma, moving back into town from the north-west.**

Left: **A New Zealand Sherman rolling past shell-blasted houses at the southern end of the town, pictured by AFPU Sergeant Menzies. (IWM)** *Right:* **The official caption labelled this picture as taken 'in the La Romola area' but Perry found it had in fact been made in San Casciano — three miles distant from La Romola. This is the Piazza Matteotti, with the town gate on the Via Morrocchesi behind. The new pedestrian walkway prevented an exact match. (Rowe)**

An M-10 tank destroyer from A Troop of the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment, 2nd NZ Division, in the Piazza L. Zannoni at the northern end of town, pictured by George Kaye on August 1. (ATL)

As a result San Casciano was abandoned. Shortly before 10 a.m. on July 26 a patrol from the New Zealand 22nd Motor Battalion entered the highway town unopposed, save for the odd bit of sniper fire. Despite being mined and booby-trapped, with roads blocked by bombing and demolitions, the snipers were soon cleared out in a house-to-house search by the infantry with tanks in support.

At the same time, the South African Armoured Division followed the German withdrawal as far as possible. After having been held up by the 356. Infanterie-Division for two days, its 11th Armoured Brigade entered Mercatale at dusk on the 26th, but was then checked by units of the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division as they moved north towards the Greve river. On the division's right flank, east of the Greve river, the 1st Scots Guards captured the Poggio Mandorli height (294 metres). Thereafter the division was halted on the outposts of the 'Paula' Line, which in this sector was based on two towns, Strada in the east and Impruneta in the west.

At Poppiano, on the New Zealand Division front, the German paratroopers were caught thinning-out from the 'Olga' Line by the 5th Brigade's attack. Quickly exploiting this opportunity the 6th Brigade passed through the 5th Brigade and with the coming of dawn on July 27 infantry from the 24th Battalion, supported by the 19th Armoured Regiment, began their assault across the Pesa river. An infantry patrol reached the riverbank around 7 a.m. and soon discovered that the bridge in their area had been blown. However, the demolished bridge had so dammed the river that it was possible to ford it. On finding no enemy troops on their side, the tanks were called up to assist the infantry across the river. After the lead Shermans ran onto mines on the riverbank the sappers bulldozed a new approach in an unmined area. In the meantime the infantry crossed the river and discovered that the Germans had withdrawn from the river-bank town of Cerbaia.

Left: **The road behind the M-10 is the old Route 2 (a parallel motorway today bypasses the town) leading north out of town to Florence. Although it may appear that the tank destroyer was going in the wrong direction, it was actually heading for a side road that leads west to the town of Cerbaia, an important objective. (Rowe)**

Left: **On July 27, the New Zealand 6th Brigade, advancing west of San Casciano, launched a surprise assault across the Pesa river and established a bridgehead at Cerbaia. This then became the base for the assault against the 'Paula' Line which paralleled the river in the hills just to the north. Here, a New Zealand 6-pounder anti-tank gun is drawn up in the rubble-strewn streets of Cerbaia. (V. Bruce)** *Right:* **The gun stood on the main street leading north-east out of town to Chiesanuova. The view is south towards the town square, visible in the distance. The Pesa lies beyond. (Rowe)**

That same day (July 27), on the South African Division front, the 3rd Coldstream Guards set off along Route 222 for the town of Strada riding on the tanks of the Pretoria Regiment — such was their confidence that the fall of Florence was near. With their reconnaissance tanks in the lead, they ran over the last ridge before Strada and were hit really hard. Three of the tanks went up on mines on the other side of the ridge and the rest withdrew below the crest under fire from Tigers and self-propelled guns. No. 2 Company of the Coldstreams dug in while Nos. 3 and 4 Companies fought their way forward across the open ground. No. 4 Company lost a third of its number in casualties and, when they reached the top of a hill just short of Strada, they found the Germans still on the summit and occupying the reverse slope. The company had to dig in under accurate mortar fire and within a few metres of the Germans and, as a result, no rations or water could be sent up to them. Some of the Pretoria Regiment tanks also reached the summit, despite the difficult going through the woods while under accurate shell-fire, and managed to keep the Germans off the reverse slopes. A patrol from No. 2 Company set out for Strada and was not seen again.

Early on July 28, B Company of the 1st Scots Guards was ordered to relieve the hard-pressed Coldstream company. At the same time some Pretoria Regiment Shermans, along with A Squadron of the Prince Albert's Guards, were directed onto Poneta Ridge and Strada to assist them. But even this was not enough to subdue the troops of the 356. Infanterie-Division, who had brought up tanks, self-propelled artillery and anti-tank guns and, when some of the trees were set on fire by mortar and shell-fire, a number of the Pretoria Regiment tanks were seriously endangered.

Late in the afternoon the summit of the ridge was taken by a bayonet charge by the Scots Guards in which no quarter was given and no Germans retired or surrendered. After dark the Scots Guards' right-flank company took over the positions captured by No. 4 Company of the Coldstream Guards, and the left-flank company was sent to reinforce B Company, whose strength had been reduced by 20 from a depleted force of 80. Despite this the Germans still held part of the crest of the ridge, from which they were firing on the Scots Guards, who responded by pushing C Company up. With infantry unable to get supplies, the Pretoria Regiment tanks had to carry water up to them. Clearly, deadlock had set in and any further advance on Florence along the axis of Route 222 was for the moment impossible.

Meanwhile, further west on the South African Division's front, the Witwatersrand Regiment, under command of the 11th Armoured Brigade, had moved forward from Mecatale on the 27th to take up position on the height overlooking the Greve river. Patrols soon established that the enemy were on the high ground across the river and in and around the houses of the village of Santa Lucia Nuova. Attempts to cross here, however, proved unsuccessful. The engineers of No. 8 Field Squadron had to abandon their attempt to develop an approach to the river due to enemy fire.

The following morning, April 28, patrols from the Royal Natal Carabineers found that the Ponte Cappello bridge, two miles north-west of Santa Lucia Nuova, had been destroyed but did locate a crossing place another mile further west, near the hamlet of Le Sibille, where it would be possible to get tanks over the river.

Above: **New Zealand trucks parked a little further up the street from the previous picture. (V. Bruce)** *Below:* **The housing block in the background has been rebuilt and modern cars replace the wartime vehicles but otherwise time has stood still in Cerbaia. (Plowman)**

Left: **That same night, July 27/28, the New Zealand Division began its attack into the hills, their objectives being the hilltop towns of La Romola and San Michele and the ridges in between. In the centre, C Company of the 26th Battalion reached the Poggio Cigoli, better known to the soldiers as Point 281, and took up position in this farm barn. Tanks from C Squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment joined them but, when the Germans counter-attacked with armoured support, two of them were quickly knocked out, including that of Captain Douglas McInnes. The remaining Shermans withdrew, forcing the infantry to relinquish the buildings when the Germans pressed their attack. According to Private Trevor Corbishley, who took this photograph after the battle, the remains of smoke damage on the barn marks the position where McInnes' tank caught fire after being hit by an AP shell. (McMillan Brown Library)** *Right:* **The same farm pictured by Claudio Biscarini in December 2002. The barn has now been incorporated into a living space by the owners of the house, the Castellini family.**

FIRST ATTACKS ON THE 'PAULA' LINE (JULY 28-29)

Meanwhile on the New Zealand Division front there had been a change in plan. West of Route 2, several roads led into the Pian di Cerri hills from the valley of the Pesa. One ran from Cerbaia north-eastwards along a ridge to the town of La Romola, while another, a bit further west, ran from Castellare up a ridge to San Michele-a-Torri, these two towns forming the line of the next objective for the 6th Brigade. A further road, also from Castellare, led up a ridge between La Romola and San Michele. General Freyberg had originally expected these two towns — six miles south-west of Florence — to form the main axis of his division's advance with the view that, once they had been occupied, the New Zealanders' 4th Armoured Brigade was to pass through the 6th Brigade and make a dash for the Arno in the vicinity of Signa. However, the enemy's early withdrawal from San Casciano caused an adjustment of the plan, allowing the division to widen its advance to a two-brigade one. Thus while the 6th Brigade on the left was to drive on San Michele and the ridge to the east of it, the 4th Armoured Brigade on the right was to maintain the push from San Casciano and make a drive for La Romola.

On the night of July 27/28, C Company of the 26th Battalion (6th Brigade) advanced up the road from Castellare but, owing to the difficulties encountered and the need to sweep for mines, the infantry soon outpaced the tanks. As early as 2 a.m. the company reported that they had managed to advance 500 yards beyond the Poggio Cigoli height (Point 281) but had not been able to make contact with the 24th Battalion, who were supposed to advance to the Poggio La Liona (Point 261). Seven tanks from C Squadron, 19th Armoured Regiment, eventually were able to push past a demolition lower down and join the infantry, some bringing Vickers machine guns while two tanks were sent back for anti-tank guns.

By dawn it was apparent that C Company, 26th Battalion, had gone further than intended and were out on a limb, as 24th Battalion's companies were well short of their objectives. Shortly after dawn the Germans brought a large concentration of guns to bear on the 26th Battalion salient. The initial New Zealand response was to do nothing because they were expecting the enemy to fall back, as had happened before. However, within a short space of time the C Squadron tanks that were up with C Company came under fire from enemy armour on the La Romola ridge. One was immobilised, while another under the command of Captain Douglas McInnes caught fire after McInnes himself was blown out of the turret by the explosion. The rest of his crew perished inside. Those tanks still mobile soon retreated leaving C Company without support. Under fire from three sides, the infantry withdrew to a house near Point 281 and when troops of the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division (Generalleutnant Walter Fries) launched a strong counter-attack they retired further down the slope. Having driven this company back, the Germans seemed to pause in their counter-attack, only to renew it later in the afternoon with less success.

Left: **The 26th Battalion retook the farmhouse several days later, as part of 6th Brigade's second attack on the 'Paula' Line on the night of August 1/2. During a counter-attack a German PzKpfw IV, belonging to Panzer-Abteilung 29 of the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division, blew this hole in the wall on the other side of the building.** *Right:* **Fortunately for the soldiers concerned, Private Corbishley and one other, before the panzer could fire again it was hit and blew up. (Corbishley)**

Meanwhile, on the division's right flank on July 27, the 4th Armoured Brigade had started its advance from newly captured San Casciano. Later that day, the 22nd Motor Battalion sent out patrols to reconnoitre the roads radiating out to the north. One going west towards Cerbaia, backed by some tanks from the 20th Armoured Regiment, was halted a mile out of town by a road demolition, losing one tank in the process. Another, going north supported by some tanks from the 19th Armoured Regiment, was more successful and, despite being delayed by demolitions, eventually advanced two miles and occupied the village of Spedaletto.

In between these patrols, early on July 28 the battalion's No. 3 Company accompanied by eight Sherman tanks from B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, set out to the north-west towards La Romola along what was little better than a goat track. The tanks got as far as the hamlet of Pisignano, about halfway to La Romola, around 4.30 a.m. Their accompanying infantry pushed on but soon met with opposition and were forced to withdraw and rejoin them.

As it was getting light, the force decided to consolidate around the hamlet, which faced La Romola across the Sugana valley. After the tanks had dispersed along the reverse slope, the crews unloaded their surplus gear and began to prepare breakfast until orders came through to push on at once. On hearing about the almost unopposed advance of the 26th Battalion up the Poggio Cigoli road, the 4th Armoured Brigade had decided to continue the advance in an attempt to draw level with the 6th Brigade's right flank.

The first tank over the ridge and down the steep, rutted, zigzagging track was that of 2nd Lieutenant John Ritchie of No. 8 Troop, accompanied by a section of infantry. He reached the flat area below safely and stopped on the edge of a four-foot vertical drop. With only desultory fire greeting them, Sergeant Jim Bell's tank was sent down, followed by Corporal Stan Harrison's. Once at the bottom all three Shermans opened up with their Brownings, then all hell broke loose and in less than five minutes No. 8 Troop had been eliminated. Harrison's tank was hit first, the shell exploding on the turret ring and killing the turret crew. Before the other two tanks could disperse they were knocked out in quick succession. The shell

The attack on La Romola on July 28 was undertaken by the 4th Armoured Brigade from San Casciano. Things here went wrong when Sherman tanks of No. 8 Troop of B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, commanded by 2nd Lieutenant John Ritchie and accompanying an infantry company from the 22nd Motor Battalion down a rough hill track, was ambushed by the Germans just as they reached the better-surfaced road to La Romola in the Sugana valley below the town. All three tanks of the troop were knocked out in quick succession, putting a speedy end to the New Zealanders' advance. This picture shows two of the disabled tanks. The one in the foreground has been penetrated on the driver's side by an armour-piercing round, suggesting the enemy fire came from down the valley towards Cerbaia. There are some similarities to this incident and one described in the unit history of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 508. Somewhere between Siena and Florence Leutnant Harder from 2. Kompanie discovered three hostile tanks and ordered the driver to break cover. The gunner, Siegfried Wiedmann, fired three shells, got three tanks and then they hastily retired. Recent information supplied by the driver of Harder's Tiger suggests that they were firing from left of the three tanks. (J. C. Montgomery)

Right: **The same spot along the Cerbaia–Chiesanuova road today. The turn-off to La Romola lies around the bend some 1,000 yards further up the road. The orchard fence on the right prevented an exact match. (Plowman)**

Left: **Another view of the Sherman seen at rear in the previous picture. It has run off its broken right-hand track. The disabled tanks were photographed by numerous servicemen but most pictures show them stripped of their tracks, running gear and other items. Roberto Gheri, a local teenager in 1944, remembers that the first thing the locals did was to cut the rubber from the bogie wheels to make soles for their shoes. (J. C. Montgomery)** *Right:* **The Renault stands on the track from Pisignano. The villa seen behind the tank, today the home of a respected local artist, is all but obscured by trees. (Plowman)**

The valley of the Sugana stream with the town of La Romola on the ridge above. The remains of the three knocked-out Sherman tanks of Lieutenant Ritchie's platoon can be seen just above the roof of the farmhouse in the foreground. This picture was taken after the battle by Private Jack Cummins from No. 16 Platoon, No. 3 Company, 22nd Battalion, whose platoon sheltered in the house during the second attack on La Romola of July 31/August 1. The night before the attack, Cummins was detailed to deliver a meal to his comrades in the farmhouse. (J. Cummins)

that hit Sergeant Bell's Sherman punched some metal onto his grenade box causing an explosion that blew off his right foot. Fearing a brew-up Bell jumped from the top of the turret to the ground, where he was joined by his crew who, disobeying him, dragged him towards cover and dropped him into a ditch. Shortly afterwards he was rescued by a carrier from Regimental Aid Post. With German mortars and machine guns blasting the area, the rest of the men took shelter in a large house 200 yards short of the hill track and then gradually filtered their way back to the squadron under the cover of this fire. After spending the rest of the day behind the Pisignano ridge they were relieved by C Squadron. Thus ended the first attempt on La Romola.

Jeff Plowman's comparison taken from lower down the slope, nearer to the farmhouse, in 2000.

Left: **San Michele, 6th Brigade's other objective in the hills above Cerbaia, was entered by D Company of the 24th Battalion early on July 29, and then became the scene of some very fierce fighting as the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division tried to retake the village. D Company's HQ and one platoon were in the church, seen on the left, and another platoon had established itself in the building on the right, baptised 'The School'.**

In the course of the battle, which lasted all day, German tanks approached to within point-blank range of both buildings. Note the 6-pounder in front of the church, one of the four battalion anti-tank guns set up in the village to support the infantry. (G. Cooper) *Right:* **The schoolhouse was demolished after the war but the church remains. Extensively rebuilt, it has lost its distinctive bell-shaped window above the door. (Rowe)**

In a renewal of the New Zealand assault the 6th Brigade, on the left flank, was ordered to attack San Michele, while the 4th Armoured Brigade was to get into La Romola if possible. Early in the morning of July 29, the 24th Battalion advanced along the Castellare road, quickly occupying a German strong point at the hamlet of Mezzocolle. Pushing on from there D Company entered San Michele without opposition and completed its occupation around 3.15 a.m. One platoon set up strong points in three houses at the southern end of the town, another platoon occupied a three-storey house known as 'The School', while Company HQ and the other platoon occupied a church at the northern end. With this complete No. 7 Troop of B Squadron, 19th Armoured Regiment, was sent in to support, along with a section of Vickers machine guns, four 6-pounder anti-tank guns and two 3-inch mortars. One tank was disabled on the way up but the other two took up positions, one behind the church and the other further back.

With the coming of dawn the town was heavily shelled and mortared and, at first, the presence of tanks in the village and defensive artillery fire seemed to discourage the approach of the Germans. They then began launching infantry and tank attacks against the church. By mid-morning at least one German tank had worked its way very close to the church and panzergrenadier soldiers had infiltrated into the southern part. The town was also under fire from the ridge to the west. Things then quietened down until midday when the Germans became aggressive again. By now the church had been so badly damaged that the troops occupying it had been forced to build a parapet from the rubble and cover the gaps with Brens and rifles, effectively blocking enemy entry.

Most German counter-attacks on the New Zealanders in San Michele came from the north up this track and were launched from the Fattoria (factory) seen in the distance. Heavily shelled by both sides, the path became known as 'Stonk Alley'. (G. Cooper)

A New Zealand soldier inspects wrecked trucks in front of the Fattoria after the battle. (G. Cooper)

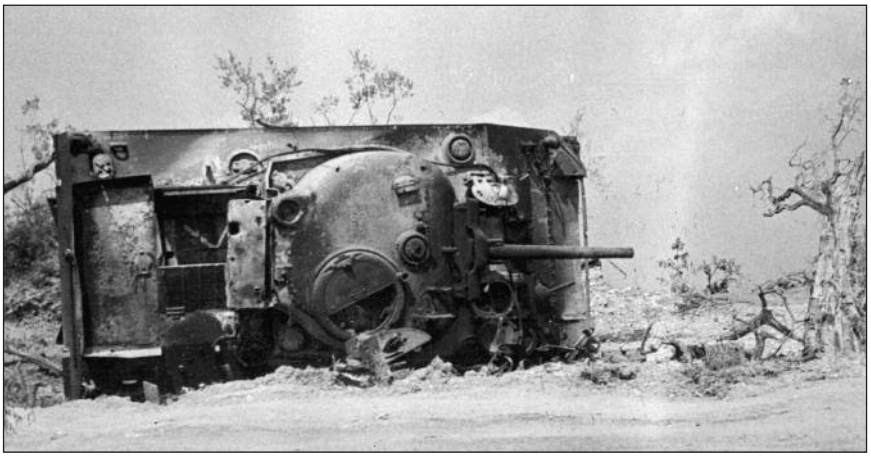
'Stonk Alley' as it looks today, pictured by Perry Rowe through a gate beside the church, just visible on the right.

To back up the infantry in the town No. 5 Troop of the 19th Armoured Regiment was sent in. One New Zealand platoon was pinned down in a barn by German panzergrenadiers occupying the top half. One of the two tanks that arrived overturned down a bank while manoeuvring into position to engage the loft. Nevertheless the New Zealand infantry got clear of the building and the other tank blasted the attic. However, its success was short-lived as it was knocked out by a German self-propelled gun when it went forward to support an attack on another building nearby.

Throughout the battle for San Michele, the Desert Air Force supported the New Zealanders. Again and again, its fighters-bombers came swooping low over the green hills and the savagely disputed village attacking enemy strong points, forming-up areas and gun positions.

Over the rest of the afternoon fire from the German lines continued, steadily reducing the town to rubble and destroying the anti-tank guns and vehicles parked outside. Around 7.20 p.m. the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division renewed its attack, with self-propelled guns and tanks approaching the strong point in the schoolhouse to within almost point-blank range — the battle lasting for another two hours. The only two remaining Sherman tanks in the village withdrew to the rear, their guns rendered useless from repeated hits. One of them under Lieutenant Bob McCowan had acted as an OP for some of the time with McCowan observing from the church steeple with a long lead down to his tank. On several occasions he had to return to it to fight off attackers, scoring a direct hit on an enemy tank during one attack.

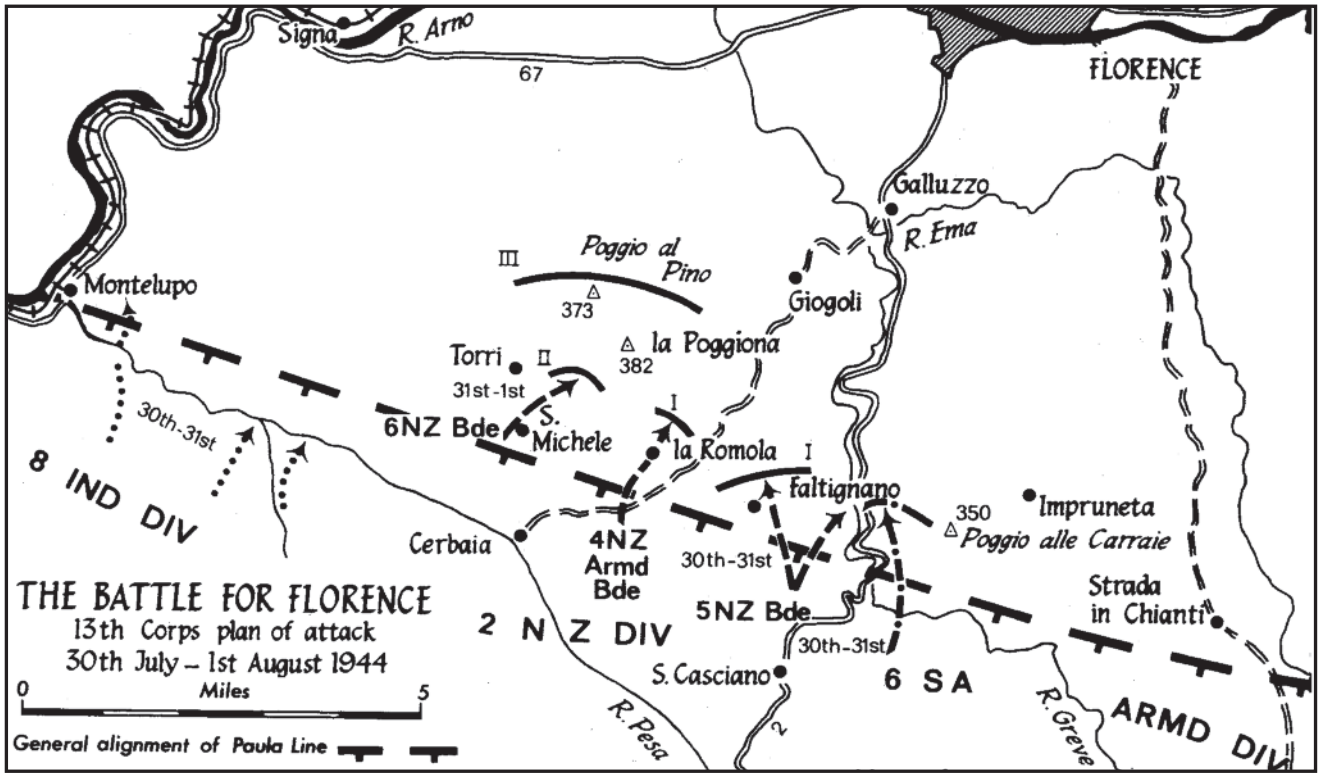
With the departure of the tanks the platoon in the church tried to get away but only the first two men succeeded, the third to try getting hit and captured. The rest decided to fight it out from the church and the crypt. German infantry supported by a Mark IV tank made another attempt to get into the church but were repulsed with assistance from fire in the schoolhouse. The Mark IV then closed in on the church but was beaten back by fire from a lone PIAT gunner, one round jamming the turret. Eventually, under more shell-fire, the front of the church collapsed, forming a barricade across the doorway, effectively trapping the defenders inside, at which point the Germans appeared to give up and withdrew. This was their last attempt to re-take the town. In the early hours of the following morning (July 30) infantry from the 25th Battalion and tanks from the 18th and 19th Armoured Regiments arrived and relieved the embattled survivors. Nevertheless, the Germans had won the first battles for the 'Paula' Line in this sector.



At the height of the battle, a supporting Sherman from No. 5 Troop of the 19th Armoured Regiment capsized while manoeuvring to engage some Germans in a barn loft who threatened to overwhelm a New Zealand platoon on the ground floor. (ANZ)

The main road passing through San Michele looking towards the church. The overturned Sherman is partly blocking the road ahead. One of the 24th Battalion's anti-tank guns was emplaced by the house to the right. (G. Cooper)

The house has been neatly repaired, but trees obscure the view of the church. (Rowe)



Things were not going well for the South Africans either. On the afternoon of July 29 C Company of the Witwatersrand Regiment, under the 11th South African Armoured Brigade, put in an attack on the village of Santa Lucia in the Greve river valley supported by two troops from the Prince Alfred's Guard. The attack started off badly when the attacking companies were heavily shelled and mortared just as they set off from their start line. The tanks moved up but soon lost contact with one platoon on the steep wooded slopes. Intense enemy fire also hit this same platoon from the other side of the valley. Hot fighting soon developed, with C Company pushing home their attack in the face of bitter resistance and in spite of mounting casualties. So close was the fighting that an early casualty was shot through the hand as he brushed aside one of the defender's weapons.

Under these circumstances the tanks were able to give only a little direct fire support but the self-propelled guns of the supporting artillery were able to put down an effective concentration of fire. However, when the German defenders — troops of the 356. Infanterie-Division — became aware of the Shermans from the Prince Alfred's Guard, they pulled back drawing more artillery fire. Thus, it was a much depleted company from the Witwatersrand Regiment that eventually occupied Santa Lucia that evening, most of their officers and sergeants having been wounded in the attack. On entering the village one of the Prince Alfred's Guard's Shermans was shot through the engine doors and put out of action.

With their objectives secured, the company consolidated in the village and endured a solid hour's hammering from German guns and mortars before settling down to a quieter night. To back them up D Company was sent up in support. At the same time the Royal Natal Carabineers moved into the Castelbonsi area, to close a large gap that had developed between them and the New Zealand Division.

Thus, like the Guards Brigade before Strada to their right, and the New Zealand Division at La Romola to their left, the South Africans in the Greve valley had reached deadlock.

PLANS FOR A NEW ATTACK ON THE 'PAULA' LINE

By July 29, the XIII Corps' advance west of the Chianti Range had everywhere been halted by the 14. Armee's 'Paula' Line, the last of the German delaying positions south of Florence. Starting from the junction of the Pesa and Arno rivers at Montelupo it followed the ridges on the north bank of the Pesa through San Michele and La Romola before swinging eastward across Route 2 and continuing past Impruneta and Strada to the boundary with 10. Armee at Monte Scalari (700 metres). Manning the line were the four divisions of the I. Fallschirm-Korps: the 3. and 29. Panzergrenadier-Divisions, the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division and the 356. Infanterie-Division.

By now General Kirkman had decided that in order to breach the 'Paula' Line he must mount a fresh corps attack for which the New Zealand and South African Divisions would be best placed. He chose to launch the attack in the area about Route 2, both because the road provided the best approach to Florence and because the heights there were less formidable than in other sectors. The 4th Division on the right and the 8th Indian Division on the left would protect the flanks of the main thrust, while the British 6th Armoured Division on the far right was to advance as opportunity offered.

The New Zealand Division was to start the offensive on the night of July 30/31 with an attack on a narrow front between the highway and the Pesa river. This was to be supported by an extensive artillery programme in which the New Zealand guns were to be joined by those of the two flanking divisions and the 1st Army Group Royal Artillery. To give the assault more punch the 8th Indian Division was to take over the western third of the New Zealand sector. Once the New Zealanders had breached the 'Paula' Line, the South African Division on their right was to neutralise the enemy occupying the high ground west of Impruneta and prepare to take over the clearance of Route 2 into Florence. The three divisions — Indian, New Zealand, and South African — were in effect to execute a half right wheel along the line of the Pesa to converge on Florence from the south-west.

THE NEW ZEALANDERS ATTACK (JULY 29-31)

However, before the attack could get underway, the New Zealand Division had to solve a problem on its right flank. As the main body of the South African Division was still to the south-east, held up by enemy fire and difficult going around Greve, any attack by the New Zealanders in this area could face heavy casualties. To overcome this difficulty the 5th Brigade was brought around to the right to secure this ground. The brigade, supported by part of the 20th Armoured Regiment, assumed responsibility for the division's right flank on the evening of July 29. The following day its 23rd Battalion occupied the village of Sant' Andrea in Percussina and held it against determined counter-attacks by German paratroops who were backed up by a Tiger tank. In the meantime the South African Division was instructed to hold its positions without any major attack.

The main attack by the New Zealand Division took place on the night of July 30/31. The division was now deployed on a three-brigade front: the 5th Brigade facing the village of Faltignano, the 4th Armoured Brigade opposite La Romola and the 6th Brigade in San Michele. The divisional plan called for the 4th Armoured and 5th Brigades to attack on the first night, followed by the 6th Brigade on the second. After this the 4th Armoured Brigade was to drop back, leaving the two infantry brigades to make the final assault to break the 'Paula' Line.

First objective of the 5th Brigade was the high ground north of Sant' Andrea and the village of Faltignano to its left. This attack was timed to start at 10 p.m. — three hours before 4th Armoured Brigade's attack on La Romola. The 23rd Battalion, on the right, were charged with securing a line through Sant' Andrea to a point 1,000 yards to the north-west and were successful in doing that. On their left, C Company of the 28th Maori Battalion were able to secure Faltignano but could make no further progress until their support weapons were brought up. These, like the supporting tanks, had been halted by an impassable stretch of the Suganella stream. The same situation was confronting the battalion's A Company and, faced with a

Shortly after midnight on July 30/31, as part of a set-piece divisional attack and under cover of a heavy artillery barrage, the 4th Armoured Brigade renewed its assault on La Romola. Despite a night of chaos and confusion, by dawn various infantry platoons of the 22nd Motor Battalion and a troop of tanks from the 20th Armoured Regiment had managed to gain a foothold in the town. This building in the main piazza was quite extensively damaged in the fighting. (N. Overton)

Repaired and restored, it still stands today. (Plowman)

six-hour delay until engineers could bridge the stream, the tanks and support weapons were routed through 23rd Battalion's sector. By the end of the day the Maori Battalion had reached its set objectives, even though it had been a precarious time for some, such as A Company who had been without tank support, anti-tank guns or artillery observers and had been pinned down for some time by a suspect Tiger.

The 4th Armoured Brigade attack on La Romola was undertaken by the 22nd Motor Battalion supported by C Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, each tank troop being accompanied by a detachment of engineers. In addition No. 11 Troop, starting from Cigliano on the right, had a bulldozer to clear a track down to the valley floor as this route was even worse than the one at Pisignano. The attack kicked off at 1 a.m. on July 31 and things immediately began to go wrong. Intense German shell-fire covered the start line as the infantry platoons got into position and then the New Zealand artillery joined in making it worse. Visibility that night was poor enough but it was now made worse by the foul-smelling dust and smoke thrown up by the shells. The resulting attack was a shambles and it was surprising it succeeded at all. Far from being a co-ordinated drive, the infantry assault soon broke up into a series of isolated groups all moving independently, many believing they were the only ones left to carry out the task. To add to this isolation radio links failed everywhere and men remained out of communication, sometimes for hours on end. The enemy was misled too: several parties of Germans, absolutely convinced that the attack had failed, walked innocently into captivity or death.

Nevertheless by dawn isolated groups of infantry had penetrated into La Romola, among them No. 15 Platoon. They had had a harrowing night, initially splitting up after crossing the start line, then being held up for two hours in a house on the outskirts of the town. It was there that they nearly shot some fellow infantrymen — a burst of Bren-gun fire directed questioningly above the roof brought a response 'Stop that Bren, you silly buggers!' with the result that the survivors from No. 13 Platoon emerged from the gloom. After unsuccessfully trying to raise Company HQ or the tanks they pushed on, arriving at La Romola at daybreak.

Things were no better for the tanks and in the dark the infantry soon left them behind. Some of the bends in the track down from Cigliano were too sharp to get round and the tanks had to back up to get room to turn. When they got to the bottom the lead Sherman threw a track on the last turn. Fortunately the other tanks in the troop were able to get past. Only No. 9 Troop had a better run, their commander leading the tanks forward on foot.

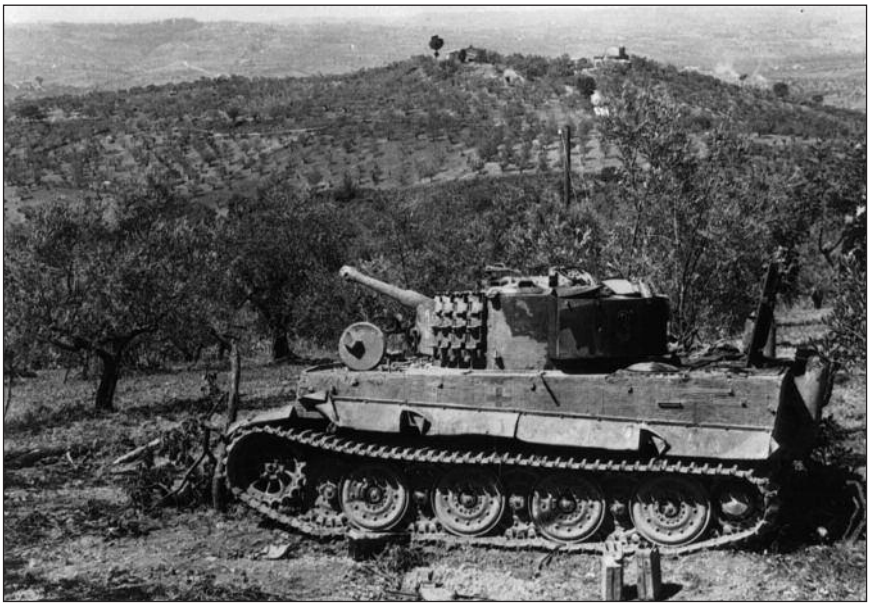
Left: **After the battle for La Romola, ten men from the divisional 7th Anti-Tank Regiment died when the house they were in blew up. The explosion was believed to have been caused by a delayed-action charge or a shell detonating a heap of enemy explosive stacked in the house. Private Cummins photographed the remains of the house shortly after the battle.** *Right:* **The house on Via Treggiaia was not rebuilt, the site where it stood today forming the Piazza Alaccia. (Plowman)**

Left: **During the advance into La Romola, 2nd Lieutenant Arthur Woolcott and a few men from his No. 5 Platoon, 22nd Battalion, captured a Tiger of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 508, surprising the crew as they were having breakfast inside the tank. Later that morning, AFPU Sergeant Menzies photographed the German tankers as they were being interrogated in the town. The only record their parent unit had of this event was that the tank commander was Unteroffizier Heberer and he was reported to have been captured on July 30 near Galluzzo. (IWM)** *Right:* **The Recovery Section of the 4th Armoured Brigade Workshops tried to get the Tiger back but the road collapsed, with the result that the tank rolled onto its turret. (J. C. Montgomery)**

The tanks of this troop were part of a right hook being conducted with 2nd Lieutenant Arthur Woolcott's No. 5 Platoon and they too got into La Romola by dawn. Woolcott himself was not with his platoon. He had chosen instead to lead a small patrol on the outskirts of La Romola. Approaching a cluster of houses, he and one man burst in through the front door of the one at the top, while the rest sped around the side and ran straight into a Tiger tank, undamaged, with the odd olive branch on top for extra camouflage and its gun pointing to the ground. Initially they stood there dumbstruck until Lance Corporal Kevin Dillon climbed onto the tank after first circling it. To his surprise the hatch came up and before he could surrender the Germans did. While the crew was escorted into La Romola, Woolcott inspected the tank and found it to be in perfect running order. (The Tiger, the bane of the New Zealanders at the best of times, extracted its revenge on them in its own inimical way. The tank recovery people eventually drove it away but the sight of a Tiger moving down the road towards the Battalion B Echelon area created the impression of a German breakthrough, causing a minor panic in the rear areas when it appeared!)

With 5th Brigade's positions secure and La Romola in New Zealand hands a temporary halt was called in the division's advance. While the battle had gone well, and all initial objectives had been taken, heavy consumption of artillery ammunition made it necessary to postpone the second phase of the attack for 24 hours while stocks were replenished. Also, while General Freyberg was keen to push on, the 5th Brigade commander, Brigadier Keith Stewart, felt the need for time to consolidate his positions. As a result no major assault was made on the night of July 31/August 1.

This pause was not without incident however. At dawn on August 1, Brigadier Stewart set out to visit his forward troops in a scout car borrowed from the 20th Armoured Regiment. Unfortunately, after driving past the forward troops of the 28th Maori Battalion, without seeing them, he was in the process of reconnoitring some high ground



Later they managed to turn it back on its tracks. The Tiger is still facing the Pisignano Ridge, the direction of the New Zealand attack, suggesting that it was overturned during an attempt to either back or tow it out on the very narrow road. The number on the turret indicates it was from 3. Kompanie. (IWM)

Right: **Roberto Gheri led Jeff Plowman to the spot on the Via della Chiesa where the Tiger was photographed. The view is south, the Pesa river lying behind the hill in the background.**

With La Romola secure, Shermans from C Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment, and a light Honey tank on the left, have parked in the town square. (W. de Lautour)

when he was held up by a few Germans with a bazooka and taken prisoner. He was unable to prevent some information falling into enemy hands, including a marked map showing the directions of the enemy thrusts and the corps' main points of resistance to these.

As seen from the German side, the day's battle at La Romola on August 31 had been a good one. Kesselring reported to OKW that 'despite enemy penetrations and 50,000 artillery hits on their sector', the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division had achieved a defensive success.

Meanwhile, blocked by staunch opposition from the 356. Infanterie-Division, the 6th South African Armoured Division could do no more than hold their positions while the New Zealand Division pursued their attacks on the 'Paula' Line. During the attack on La Romola the South Africans were merely ordered to arrange a fire-plan to simulate a divisional assault and to neutralise areas from which enemy fire could be expected on the New Zealanders. Nevertheless patrols were sent out to find suitable crossing points for tanks over the Greve river for coming operations and one was found due east of Santa Lucia, where good approaches and a hard riverbed made it feasible for wheeled vehicles too.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the front-line, the German commanders were acutely conscious that they could not cling on to the 'Paula' Line for much longer. Like his Allied opponent, Generalleutnant Schlemm of the I. Fallschirm-Korps faced a severe shortage of ammunition, as lack of fuel for his lorries hampered the provision of new supplies. On July 28, when high casualties were reported, Generaloberst Lemelsen of the 14. Armee had informed Kesselring that the I. Fallschirm-Korps could only continue to hang on if it received fresh troops, which Lemelsen did not have. Instead an alternative alleviation — a retraction of his boundary with the 10. Armee — was sanctioned by Kesselring on the 29th. Although the order to hold 'Paula' remained in force, Schlemm was authorised on the 30th to reconnoitre a fall-back position closer to Florence.

Within the city, a tough attitude was adopted by Oberst Adolf Fuchs, the commander of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 10, who had been appointed City Commandant on July 23. On the 29th, Fuchs told the Swiss Consul that it must not be supposed that the Germans would 'expose themselves to military defeat for the sake of the beauties of Florence'.

An excuse for a hardening of policies came on July 28 when General Alexander broadcast an appeal to the Florentine citizens to inform the Allies where German mines and demolitions had been laid and to clear the streets of barricades and obstacles. Leaflets dropped over Florence on the 30th carried the same message and when their discovery was reported to Kesselring he at once asked Hitler to reconsider the 'open city' status of Florence, claiming that the British clearly had no intention of 'honouring international law'.

Hitler's reply, sent on the 31st, indicated that the Führer had shifted his position. While reaffirming his order that the I. Fallschirm-Korps hold the line south of Florence, he now allowed for the possibility of destroying the Arno bridges, stipulating that they might only be blown following his personal decision. As worded in the OKW diary, 'the direction of the battle was to be adapted to the fact that it was solely the enemy who disrespected the irreplaceable cultural treasures of this city'. That day Lemelsen ordered all bridges within or near the city, except the famous 14th-century Ponte Vecchio, to be prepared for demolition. The code-word signal for blowing the bridges was 'Feuerzauber' (Fire Magic).

The Allies for their part had no intention of fighting in Florence. In his orders of July 28, Kirkman had stipulated that, if the Germans stuck to their own declaration of an open city and did not blow the bridges, his divisions were to cross by the most easterly and westerly bridges and pass through the outskirts so as to give the Germans as little excuse as possible for shelling the city. If all bridges turned out to be blown, he intended to secure crossings outside Florence.

Meanwhile, after Allied artillery fire destroyed the electric power lines leading to Florence, conditions for the civilian population worsened. All water supplies were cut off, thus further fanning a growing resentment towards the Germans, whom the Florentines regarded as the authors of all their misfortunes.

Right: **Today the Piazza 4 Novembre is one of the main parking areas for the villagers' cars. (Rowe)**

Right: **As the 2nd New Zealand Division was battling its way across the Pian di Cerri hills west of Route 2, the 6th South African Armoured Division was operating on a parallel axis east of the road. By July 29 they too had run up against the 'Paula' Line, one of the German strong points in their sector being the town of Impruneta. After the 362. Infanterie-Division pulled out on the night of August 1/2, the 5th Grenadier Guards entered the town on the morning of August 3. AFPU Sergeant Johnson pictured guardsmen moving cautiously past shell-torn houses during the mopping-up operation. (IWM)**

THE SOUTH AFRICANS JOIN THE ATTACK (AUGUST 1-2)

On July 30, enemy artillery fire began to slacken on the South African front and by the following day, July 31, had all but ceased. That night the sound of demolitions ahead of the 1st Scots Guards, still in position south of Strada, made it clear that the 356. Infanterie-Division was withdrawing.

Early on August 1, after fighter-bombers of the Desert Air Force had attacked the German positions, the Natal Mounted Rifles and tanks from the Pretoria Regiment finally entered Strada, at the same time as troops from the neighbouring 4th Division, having fought their way across Monte Scalari (787 metres), came in from the east. They were now eight miles from Florence. The Germans had accurately registered the town and soon it was under extremely heavy artillery fire. Two of the Natal Mounted Rifle tanks ran onto mines and when No. 2 Troop was engaged by enemy 88mm guns the tanks were able to knock them out.

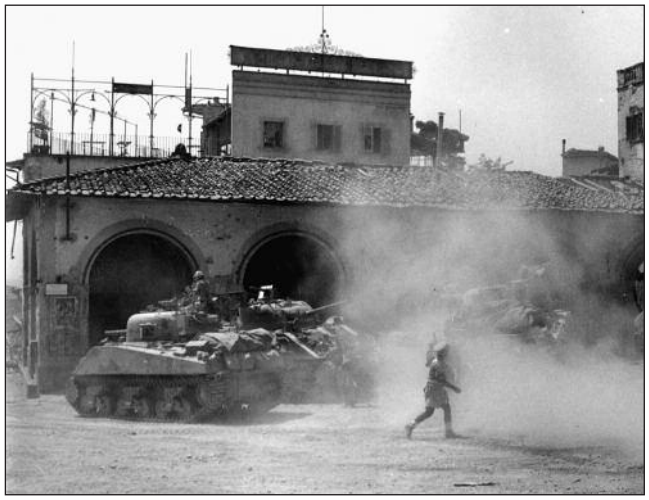
Around 8 p.m. that evening the 24th Guards Brigade, relieved by the 4th Division at Strada, launched its attack on the town of Impruneta, five miles south of Florence. The 5th Grenadier Guards, who were to occupy the hills while the 3rd Coldstreams captured the town, were soon held up by anti-tank and machine-gun fire but the enemy withdrew overnight. The following morning, August 2, the Grenadiers, accompanied by Pretoria Regiment tanks, entered the town without opposition. However, a further push beyond Impruneta proved difficult. By mid-afternoon, the Natal Mounted Rifles tanks leading the Guards Brigade had reached the hamlet of Nizzano, a mile and half north of Impruneta, and the Germans were hitting back at the infantry from Monte Oriolo.

Right: **Perry Rowe discovered that the picture had been taken along the Via della Croce.**

A little further up the same street, the patrol approaches Via della Fonte, which leads on to the town square. (IWM)

The debris has been cleared away but otherwise little has changed. (Rowe)

Left: **Many of Impruneta's streets were blocked by demolition craters or fallen debris and sappers of No. 8 Field Squadron and No. 557 Field Company first had to open the roads before tanks and transport could pass through the town. AFPU photographer Sergeant Best pictured a Sherman moving up the cleared lane in Via della Fonte. (IWM)** *Right:* **Perry discovered that the view is looking backwards towards the town square, meaning that the tank was heading south out of town. While the house on the right has gone, the building on the left survives behind the trees, confirming the match. (Rowe)**



Left: **With the roads open, South African Sherman tanks occupy the town's main square, the Piazza Buondelmonti. The unit they belong to is uncertain: it could be either the Pretoria Regiment, which had supported the Grenadier Guards into town, or the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Sherman-equipped divisional armoured recce regiment, which reconnoitred the Guards' route later in the day. (IWM)** *Right:* **The building at the south end of the square, today the Ristorante Bellavista, stands virtually unchanged. The Via della Fonte seen in the previous picture runs down the left of this. (Rowe)**

Left: **This Sherman is heading for the roads leading northward out of town, so most likely it is one of the Natal Mounted Rifles tanks that led the Guards Brigade in their push beyond Impruneta. On the right is the Palazzo Comunale, the town hall. (IWM)** *Right:* **The same spot on Via Giovanni Mazzini on the northern side of the piazza. (Rowe)**

On the night of August 1/2, the New Zealand Division pressed its attack on the 'Paula' Line. In the 6th Brigade's sector, the 26th Battalion captured Point 337, another hill some 1,000 yards north of Point 281 along the Castellare–Poggio Cigoli road. Later in the day, a PzKpfw IV from Panzer-Abteilung 29 cautiously approached the position only to be knocked out by a 17-pounder from the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment that had been set up at the nearby Casa Carbognano farm. (R. M. Gourdie)

On the night of August 1/2 the New Zealand Division resumed its attack on the 'Paula' Line. This time the advance was to be on a three-brigade front, the division effecting a right-wheel, pivoting on the 5th Brigade. The drive was led off by the 6th Brigade on the left, the main thrust being made by the 25th Battalion, whose A Company advanced up the Castellare–Poggio Cigoli road towards Point 281, with support from tanks of B Squadron, 18th Armoured Regiment. With that secure, C Company passed through and occupied the next objective just short of Point 337 taking about 30 prisoners. Then D and B Companies carried on to the third objective, the slopes of the Poggio Valicaia, where they met little opposition. As the light improved they came under increasing mortar fire, though when artillery fire was brought to bear on the suspected locations the resulting reduction in enemy fire allowed their supporting anti-tank guns to be sited, including a 17-pounder and M-10 near Point 337.

The latter were soon rewarded by the sight of a German Mark IV tank approaching along the road, some of its crew sitting outside. When it halted and started to back up, the crew of the 17-pounder dashed out from their casa, where they had been sheltering from mortar fire, and manned their gun. The first shot hit just below the panzer's turret, which was blown six feet into the air, after which the tank burst into flames and its ammunition began to explode.

Right: **Looking back at the Casa Carbognano with the summit of Point 337 behind. The anti-tank unit had set up a trap consisting of a 17-pounder and an M-10 tank destroyer. The gun was most probably sited in the large entrance beyond the drive and the M-10 on the road to the left. (Rowe)**

The view which the 17-pounder crew had from the Casa Carbognano. The Panzer IV would have been hit just to the right of where the road entered the valley. (Rowe)

Another Tiger from schwere Panzer-Abteilung 508 was found abandoned outside the Villa La Sfacciata, just north of Giogoli on the Cerbaia–Florence road, and just short of the junction of this road with Route 2 at Galluzzo. The Sherman seen behind appears to be disabled too. The conventional view is that the latter ran over a mine while attempting to bypass the Tiger, though there is no official record of any Shermans being lost to mines in this area. However it is more likely that this is in fact Lieutenant Bill Heptinstall's tank of B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, which was knocked out by a Tiger on August 3 — the more so as it is known that two Tigers were later found blown up and abandoned by their crews, presumably through lack of fuel, near that tank. Unfortunately changes in the road alignment and re-vegetation make a good comparison impossible. (R. Day)

While the 6th Brigade had gained its objectives with unexpected ease, the assaulting troops of the 4th Armoured and 5th Brigades were surprised by the determined resistance they encountered. On the night of July 31/August 1, the 22nd Motor Battalion had sent out a patrol to occupy Point 305, 1,200 yards to the north-east, but it had been repulsed, as was another consisting of a section of carriers, an infantry platoon and two tanks that afternoon.

The next attempt took place on the night of August 1/2 when two companies, supported by a troop of tanks each from the 20th Armoured Regiment, took Point 305 and then beyond it La Poggiona. This high ground five miles south-west of Florence overlooking Route 2 from the west was the last remaining favourable defensive terrain south of the Arno. The German paratroops, who had been holding the feature, quickly rallied and counter-attacked. Twice they were repulsed but in their third attempt they threatened to surround the 22nd Battalion troops holding the hill, who swiftly withdrew as they were running out of ammunition.

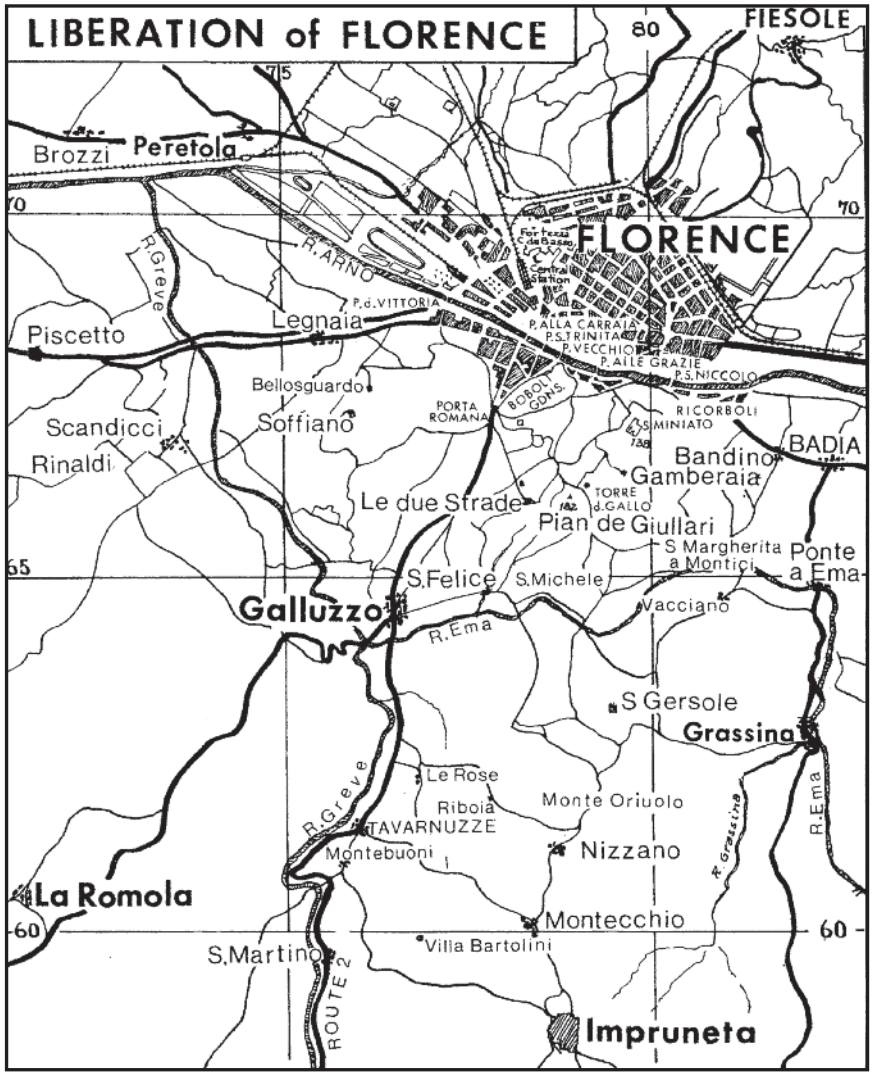
On August 2, the I. Fallschirm-Korps reported that the enemy artillery battering had caused high casualties and that in some battalions the companies had been reduced to 10 or 15 men. Convinced by these reports Kesselring allowed Schlemm to finally abandon the 'Paula' Line that night and withdraw into a bridgehead position on the line of the small Ema river, just two miles south of Florence. Strong rearguards were to be left behind to cover the withdrawal.

That same night, August 2/3, the 22nd Motor Battalion renewed its assault on La Poggiona, and a small force of 24 men succeeded in retaking the objective. When word of this got back, they were quickly reinforced by two more platoons and some tanks in preparation for more counter-attacks, as the enemy was still thought to be holding part of the northern side of the hill. Nevertheless, when daylight arrived on August 3 and the morning mists dispersed, almost all local firing ceased and the men on La Poggiona found themselves looking down onto a magnificent view of Florence.

On the division's right flank, the 28th Maori Battalion had been brought to a halt on August 1 and so it fell to the 21st Battalion to carry out the next stage. However, their attack that night did not succeed either. They were late assembling on the start line and co-ordination with the artillery barrage was poor, but the objective was also strongly defended as these were the last hills covering the principal roads along which the I. Fallschirm-Korps could withdraw its tanks and transport. Thus after a confused night the attacking troops of the 21st Battalion were forced to pull back to defensive positions in the vicinity of their start line.

The following night, August 2/3, things were better coordinated and the infantry of the 21st Battalion were able to follow closer behind the barrage and hence met little resistance. On arriving on their objective, the Poggio del Monache hill, they found numerous recently abandoned weapon pits and heard the sound of a tank or tanks withdrawing.

As 6th Brigade's sector was not considered suitable for a major breakout the division's effort on August 3 was concentrated on 5th Brigade's front. However, after another confused day of fighting, they found themselves in the evening still three miles from Florence. On the right flank the Maori Battalion with some tanks from B Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment passed through the 21st Battalion and took the village of Giogoli on the Cerbaia–Florence road. Pushing on beyond there, in the direction of Galluzzo, the lead tank commanded by a Lieutenant Bill Heptinstall was hit by a Tiger, Heptinstall alone managing to get clear. His crew were later found dead, and nearby were two Tigers that had been blown up and abandoned by their crews. No further progress was made that day.



Right: **The area of operations for the final push into Florence.**

On the morning of August 3 a South African tank/infantry column, consisting of B Squadron of the Prince Alfred's Guard and B Company of the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment riding on the tank decks and in their own transport, set out from Impruneta hoping to break through to Florence. These tanks pictured by Sergeant Johnson at 7 a.m. that morning almost certainly belong to that column. (IWM)

THE FINAL PUSH TO FLORENCE (AUGUST 2-3)

The 11th South African Armoured Brigade and the New Zealand Division axes converged onto Route 2 at the village of Galluzzo, located just two miles south of Florence. Thus it soon became a race between the two divisions to secure priority on the last stretch of road to the city, a race that the South Africans were eventually to win.

Starting off from their positions south of the Greve river at 8 a.m. on August 2, the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment sent C Company down to the river, with tanks of C Squadron of the Special Service Battalion in support, and before long the infantry were crossing on foot north of the blown Ponte Cappello bridge. Tanks and more infantry followed in their wake and very soon, despite mines and booby traps, had secured the Poggio alle Carraie high ground (Point 350), south-east of Impruneta. Later that day reconnaissance tanks ahead of the brigade reached the hamlet of Le Rose, one mile south of Galluzzo, and by nightfall the tanks had won the right to the road. As darkness fell flashes of enemy guns could be clearly seen firing from the southern suburbs of Florence. Everyone realised that the fall of the city was near. At 10 p.m. that night, B Company of the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment were warned to hold themselves ready to move into Florence as the advance guard, riding on tanks of B Squadron of the Prince Alfred's Guard from a point south of Impruneta.

At 7 a.m. on August 3, after sappers of No. 8 Field Squadron had cleared debris and filled three craters in Impruneta, the tank/infantry column set off for Florence. Moving through Impruneta, they proceeded north-west out of town towards Route 2 but were soon brought to a halt after recce troops of the Natal Mounted Rifles found the road blown, four miles short of Florence. Despite this the Natal Mounted Rifles sent five carriers forward, with the Special Service Battalion in support, hoping to reconnoitre the outskirts of the city, but they could only progress a further two miles, so numerous were the demolitions. Following in their path, the Light Horse/Kimberly infantry and Prince Alfred's Guard tanks reached Route 2 stopping at a point some distance south of Galluzzo. Later that evening B Company of the Witwatersrand Regiment moved up through them to the Ema river, immediately south of Galluzzo, so that sappers of No. 8 Field Squadron could begin bridging that last water barrier before Florence.

That same day, August 3, Kesselring ordered the I. Fallschirm-Korps to pull back behind the Arno and occupy the new line of defence along the river's north bank and around the northern limits of Florence. At the same time, the rearguards left behind by the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division pulled back into the tiny bridgehead left in the southern section of Florence. As the paratroopers fought with their backs against the Arno, the fury of combat threatened at times to engulf Florence, despite the mutual concern to spare the city. Allied artillery fire hit the quarters south of the river and occasional long rounds smashed into the city centre, hitting among other places the Piazza Museo Instituto del'Arte and the Ponte della Vittoria. Allied aircraft, flying close-support missions, also fired into parts of the city on both sides of the Arno.

With the battle clearly in its final phase, Kesselring secured Hitler's permission to destroy the river crossings. At 6 p.m. the code-word 'Feuerzauber' was given out and that night German engineers blew all bridges except one — the famous 14th-century Ponte Vecchio. Narrow and lined on either side with shops, the bridge was unsuitable for anything but foot traffic anyway, but to make sure that no vehicle would try using it, the Germans blocked both ends by systematically blowing up a number of old mediaeval houses on either bank, piling the road high with debris. (Unknown to the Germans, the Ponte Vecchio carried a telephone line which kept communications open between the area south of the river and partisan headquarters in the city.) Despite frantic last-minute attempts by the German Consul in Florence, Gerhard Wolf, and his Swiss colleague, Carlo Steinhäuslin, to save the much more valuable Ponte Santa Trinita, that bridge was among those blown up.

Judging by the clock above the SS Maria Immacolata Church, time has stood still in Impruneta. The tanks were heading up what is nowadays called the Via della Liberta toward Florence. Today that route would be a little bumpier as steps have been added and the piazza levelled off for parking. (Rowe)

Left: **In the end, the race for Florence was indeed won by the South Africans, the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment entering the city early on August 4. Sergeant Best was present to photograph the scenes of enthusiasm with which they were received at Le Due Strade, the southern suburb through which Route 2 enters the city. (IWM)** *Above:* **During one of his trips into town Perry Rowe found the road blocked by an accident. 'I happened to look back and realised I had my comparison.'**

THE ALLIES ENTER FLORENCE (AUGUST 4)

At 3 a.m. on August 4 the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment relieved the Witwatersrand Regiment at Galluzzo, where No. 8 Field Squadron were still busy constructing a large culvert crossing over the Ema with Sherman tank-dozers. The Light Horse/Kimberly pushed on and by first light their companies were occupying commanding localities north of Galluzzo and overlooking the Arno and the central area of Florence.

A Company sent forward a patrol of seven men under Lieutenant J. Adamson, as well as Captain D. V. Jeffrey and a sapper and, guided by civilians, they reached the Ponte Vecchio around 4.30 a.m. It was then that they discovered that all the other Arno bridges had been destroyed and the Ponte Vecchio, while still intact, effectively blocked by demolitions. The company patrol retired after being fired on from the northern bank, reporting their news to battalion headquarters at Galluzzo around 7.30 a.m. Shortly afterwards the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment carrier platoon moved forward and began mopping-up operations and later, at 8.30 a.m., tanks of B Squadron of the Special Service Battalion reached the Arno itself.

New Zealand troops arrived in Florence later in the morning. While one platoon of C Company, 23rd Battalion, crossed the Greve at La Gora and made contact with the South Africans, another platoon from this company and D Company riding on tanks of A Squadron, 19th Armoured Regiment, entered the city at 11 a.m. Men from the 28th Maori Battalion, with tanks from B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, also entered the southern suburbs, possibly around the same time.

Other units from the South African Division entered Florence later. The Witwatersrand Regiment passed through Galluzzo around midday, eventually reaching the city late in the afternoon, their commander setting up his headquarters in a former Fascist Party building overlooking the Gardino di Boboli. A and B Companies from the regiment took up positions along the south bank of the Arno from the Ponte alla Carraia to the Ponte Vecchio. The city was still infested with mines and booby traps and they were sniped at and engaged in street fighting by both Germans and Fascists, who were often dealt with by partisans. The 4/22nd Field Regiment sent forward Lieutenant C. G. Kerr to reconnoitre the bridges but when he climbed to the steeple of the Santo Spirito Church he was caught up in the cross-fire of street fighting. He later rescued two wounded Witwatersrand soldiers in the street below and evacuated them in his tank.

Elements of the 24th Guards Brigade also arrived in Florence early on August 4. The 3rd Coldstream Guards set off from Impruneta on August 3, clearing villas, vineyards and orchards in their path, but their accompanying armour from A Squadron of the Pretoria Regiment soon ran into trouble. While driving along a narrow, walled road the squadron commander's tank in the rear struck a mine and was blown up, effectively blocking their retreat. The others carried on at high speed, under fire from a German 88mm gun, until the lead tank struck a mine, trapping the other four between them. There they remained for several hours, under heavy shell-fire until the Coldstream infantry could clear the area. Carrying on they eventually captured half of the village of San Gersole,

A South African soldier gladly accepts a glass of wine from a happy Florentine girl. (IWM)

The portico in the wall has changed its form but otherwise the houses and shops along Le Due Strade remain as before.

Left: **A mile further on, the troops reach the Porta Romana, the 14th-century gate which forms the entrance to Florence's old city. Here, a British despatch rider, Sapper E. Davies from Kent, with his South African pillion rider, Sapper A. Foyn of Johannesburg, receive an enthusiastic reception. (IWM)** *Above:* **The couple was returning from the inner city since we are looking north towards the town centre. (Rowe)**

about two miles from Florence. Fighting was brisk but the enemy eventually slipped away in the night, before the 1st Scots Guards, supported by C Squadron of the Pretoria Regiment, passed through and entered south-eastern Florence at mid-morning of August 4. The guardsmen moved into the Santa Margherita a Montici area on foot and tried to occupy what they thought was a large 'palazzo' near the Torre del Gallo tower. This turned out to be a girls' seminary and they were forced to rapidly withdraw in the face of the lady director. They eventually took up positions on the last ridge overlooking the Palazzo Pitti, at the Porta San Miniato and in the suburb of Ricorboli.

By the end of the day troops of the South African and New Zealand Divisions held all of Florence south of the Arno. Most of the built-up area was held by the Witwatersrand Regiment who were well established at the Ponte Vecchio, at the Ponte Carraia, in the area west of the Piazza T. Tasso, and north of the Porta Romana city gate. The Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment, supported by a squadron of the Special Service Battalion, held the line from the Porta Romana westward to near Soffiano in the hills. Here they were patrolling to the Arno, from which they were subjected to some sniping and shelling from airbursts. Casualties were sustained from snipers and it was necessary to send forward tanks from the Prince Alfred's Guard to assist the infantry on the riverbank with machine-gun fire.

To their left, the 28th Maori Battalion of the New Zealand Division had consolidated on the south bank around the Ponte della Vittoria. The 21st Battalion had gone into position behind them and, in the evening, some of its men waded across the Arno and penetrated 100 yards beyond without encountering any opposition. Another patrol found a ford, suitable for tanks, a short distance downstream from the Ponte della Vittoria and saw Germans digging defensive positions in a park on the far bank. No attempt was made to cross the river, though, because of the commanding view the Germans had from the buildings across the river, on the top which they had set up machine-gun posts.

That day, August 4, under orders to make no stand within the city, the main body of the 4. Fallschirmjäger-Division withdrew to the Mugnone Canal on the north-western edge of Florence, leaving the three battalions of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 10 to garrison the city centre. The canal was to serve only as a brief delaying position before withdrawing into the 'Heinrich' Line, another delaying position located in the Mugello Hills four miles north of Florence.

On August 5, the 8th Indian Division reached the Arno west of Florence, making contact with the New Zealand Division at Signa. The Allies were now in firm control of the whole south bank of the Arno from Florence to Montelupo. East of Florence, the 4th Division made slower advances, not closing up on the river in the area of Pontasieve until August 10.

Left: **A Honey tank of the Special Service Battalion (one of the three tank battalions of the South African 11th Armoured Brigade) loaded with civilians drives across the Piazza di Porta Romana on its way to the city centre. The old town gate is behind the photographer's back. (IWM)** *Right:* **The tram lines are gone and the piazza is today a large roundabout.**

Left: **Pushing another 700 yards along Via de Serragli, AFPU Captain Gade and Sergeant Lambert came across Italian partisans engaged in a fire-fight with German snipers. (IWM)** *Right:* **No bullets flying on the corner with Via della Chiesa today.**

Left: **Captain Gade crossed the side street to take this shot of the gunmen. (IWM)** *Right:* **Looking south down Via de Serragli.**

A Sherman tank comes to the assistance of the partisans. (IWM)

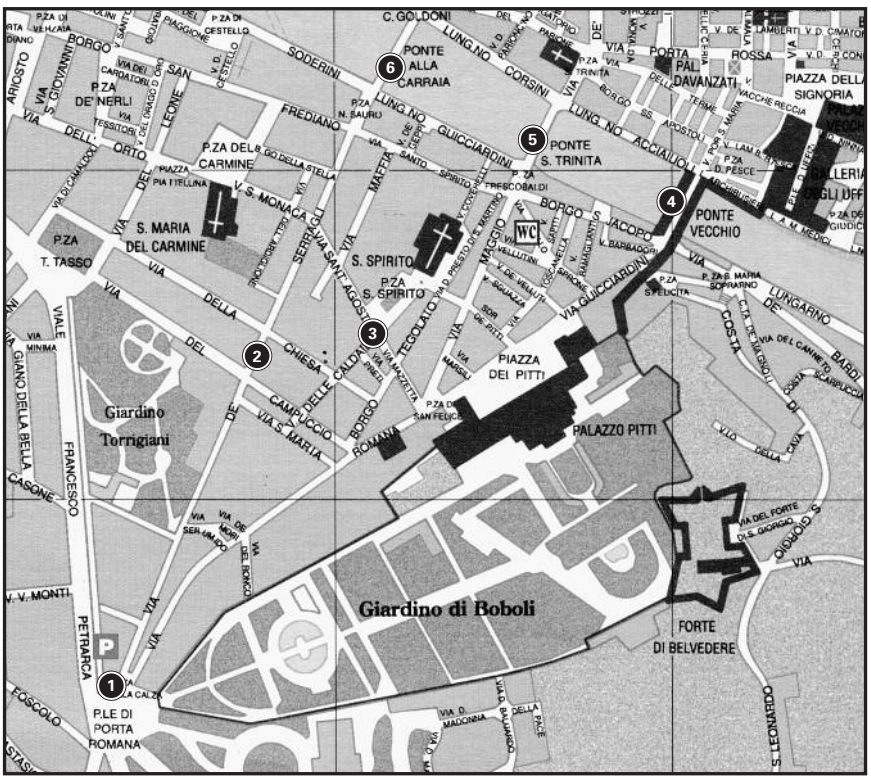
A quiet Via de Serragli photographed in September 2004.

Men of the Light Horse/Kimberly Regiment carrier platoon, assisted by Italian partisans, round up snipers in the quarter of Florence that lies south of the Arno river. (IWM)

Sergeant Best took his picture in Via Mazzetta, one block closer to the river from Via della Chiesa (see the street plan below). The view is west.

Left: **Other carriers arrive from the opposite direction. Apparently the platoon made an encircling move around the blocks where the snipers were suspected. (IWM)** *Right:* **Via Mazzetta at its corner with Borgo Tegolaio today. (Rowe)**

Above: **Memorial plaques to partisans who fell for the liberation of the city adorn many buildings in Florence. This one is located in Piazza Santo Spirito, around the corner from where the above pictures were taken.** *Right:* **The part of old Florence that lies south of the Arno river. We have marked the locations shown in our photographs. [1] Porta Romana. [2] Via de Serragli. [3] Via Mazzetta. [4] Ponte Vecchio. [5] Ponte Santa Trinita. [6] Ponte alla Carraia.**



KEY

Area evacuated by order of the Germans on July 29, 1944

Area destroyed by German demolitions on night of August 3/4, 1944

V. DEGLI STROZZI
VITT. EM. II
V. SPEZIALI
C O R S O
BORGO D. ALBIZZI
V. DE' TORNABUONI
V. MONALDA
P.ZA STROZZI
V. D. ANSELMI
R. R. POSTE E TELEGR.
V. DE' SASSETTI
VIA DE' PELLICCERIA
ORSAMM.LE
VIA CALIMALA
LAMBERTI
VIA DE' CERCHI
V. D. TAVOLINI
VIA DANTE ALIGHIERI
V. S. MARG.TA
V. D. PRESTO
V. DEL PROCONSOLO
GIRALDI
V. DE' PANDOLFINI
VIA GHIBELLINA
VIA D. ACQUA
VIA VIGNA VECCHIA
V. D. BURELLA
V. DELLA
VIA DELL' ANGUILLARA
VIA DEI CIMATORI
V. DE' MAGAZZINI
V. CONDOTTA
V. D.
P.ZA S. FIRENZE
P.ZA DELLA SIGNORIA
LOGGE DEL MERC.TO NUOVO
P.ZA S. TRINITA
VIA PORTA ROSSA
V. DEL PARIONE
V. PARIONE
V. D. INFERNO
PURGATORIO
NUOVA
RUCELLAI
PONTE ALLA CARRAIA
LUNG. CORSINI
CH.TO RICASOLI
V. DEL FIORDALISO
V. D. TERME
BORGO S. APOSTOLI
P.ZA D. LIMBO
V. VACCHEREccia
V. S. MARIA
V. LAMBERTESCA
V. D. ORO
V. PORTA ROSSA
LUNG. ACCIAIOLI
PONTE S. TRINITA
V. D. GONDI
PAL. VECCHIO (COMUNE)
V. D. NINNA
V. DEI LEONI
BORGO DEI GRECI
V. D. CORNO
V. D. PARLASCIO
V. DE' MAGALOTTI
P.ZA PERUZZI
VIA VINEGIA
V. DE' RUSTICI
V. D. BRACHE
V. DEI BENCI
L. SERRISTORI
LUNG. GUICCIARDINI
V. DE COVERELLI
V. DI S. SPIRITO
FRESCOBALDI
P.ZA
BORGO S. IACOPO
V. DELLO SPRONE
V. D. SAPITI
TOSCANELLA
V. DEI GIUDEI
PONTE VECCHIO
L. ARCHIBUSIERI
P.LE DEGLI UFFIZI
V. DE CASTELLANI
V. ALTAFRONTE
V. D. GUANTO
V. D. MOSCA
NERI
L. A. M. MEDICI
P.ZA DEI GIUDICI
V. DE' SAPONAI
P.ZA MENTANA
V. DE' VAGELLAI
V. V. MALENCHINI
LUNG. GENERALE DIAZ
V. D. PRESTO DI S. MARTINO
MAGGIO
V. D. VELLUTINI
V. DEI VELLUTI
V. SGUAZZA
SOR.TO D. PITTI
VIA GUICCIARDINI
V. D. CANNETO
COSTA
COSTA DE' MAGNOLI
SAN
LUNGARNO DEI TORRIGIANI
V. DEL CANNETO
B A R D I
COSTA SCARPUCCI
PONTE ALLE GRAZIE
BORGO TEGOLAIO
V. MAZZE
PIAZZA DEI PITTI
F.
A R N O

New Zealand troops arrived in Florence a few hours after the first South African troops. By the time they came in, things were a little more settled as is evident from the welcome given to this Sherman of the 20th Armoured Regiment (note the fern leaf divisional sign in front of the driver). On the right stands the New Zealand Broadcasting Unit, with reporter A. Curry holding the microphone. The picture was taken by NZ Army photographer George Kaye. (ATL)

The Sherman was driving down the Via Mazzetta (the same street as the South African carriers but in the opposite direction) and just about to reach the Via Romana. The famous Palazzo Pitti is immediately around the corner to the right. (Rowe)

Above: **In the evening of August 3, despite their earlier designation of Florence as an 'open city' and in a final attempt to hold up the Allied advance, the Germans destroyed five of the city's six bridges across the Arno. After Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring had secured the necessary permission from Hitler personally, at 6 p.m. the code-word 'Feuerzauber' went out to the engineer troops that had wired the river spans signalling the demolitions to go ahead. Only the 14th-century Ponte Vecchio was spared, but the Germans made sure that it too was unusable by blowing up swathes of buildings at either end, thus totally blocking access to it. The following day AFPU photographer Sergeant Menzies ventured out to the riverbank to photograph the demolished bridges. In the foreground lie the remains of the Ponte Santa Trinita. The Ponte Vecchio stands intact behind with smoke still curling up from the demolished buildings on the far bank. Built in 1566-69 by Bartolomeo Ammannati at the command of Cosimo I, the Santa Trinita was considered to be the finest of all Renaissance bridges in Florence, architecturally of much greater value than the Ponte Vecchio, which is really nothing more than picturesque. It resisted three charges of explosives before it fell. After the war the Santa Trinita was reconstructed along the original design using the old material, most of which was recovered from the riverbed. The restored bridge was re-opened in 1957, as recorded on a plaque** *(right)* **on a building at its southern end. (IWM)**

Sergeant Menzies took his shot from a house overlooking the river. Our comparison was taken from the road below. (Rowe)

CENTRAL FLORENCE IN ALLIED HANDS (AUGUST 5-15)

The 2nd New Zealand Division did not stay long in the Florence area, departing on August 5 in preparation for redeployment further west along the Arno river at Empoli. The first units of the 6th South African Armoured Division began leaving the city on August 6, moving to the Siena area for rest and reorganisation. Both their sectors were taken over by the Canadian 1st Infantry Division.

The Canadians soon discovered that not all Italians south of the river supported the Allied cause. The Royal Canadian Regiment, holding the waterfront east and west of the Ponte Vecchio, suffered casualties from civilian snipers on nearby rooftops and from occasional mortaring and shelling which the Germans were bringing down with the assistance of Fascist observers in the area. To end this practice, a force of 250 partisans, assisted by Canadian soldiers, combed the south bank on August 8, entering every building and scrutinising its inhabitants. They rounded up over 150 suspects and enough rifles, pistols and hand-grenades to fill two 15cwt trucks.

The stay of the 1st Canadian Division in the Florence sector was as brief as that of the South Africans and New Zealanders. That same evening of August 8 they were relieved by the 8th Indian Division.

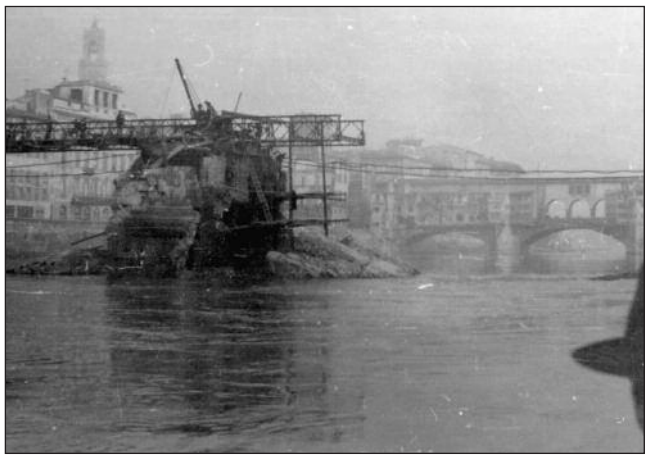
Meanwhile, the Germans still controlled the nine-tenths of the city which lay on the north bank. However, unable to cope with provision of food, water and sanitation for the city's large population, they soon realised it was better to leave. After first providing the Florentines with a two-day ration of bread, General Schlemm withdrew Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 10 across the Mugnone Canal during the night of August 10/11. As the last of the German paratroopers left, local partisans swiftly occupied those quarters of the city south and east of the canal.

At daybreak, white flags flying along the Arno waterfront signalled the Germans' departure, which partisan patrols promptly confirmed. Infantry of the 8th Indian Division and the British 1st Division on its right crossed the river, penetrating as far as the Mugnone Canal the following day. Engineers made a ford over the Arno and immediately began organising the movement of food, medical supplies and water to the starving population in the main part of the city. The opening of the Ponte Vecchio for Jeeps on the 14th eased the problem of supply, and next day the Royal Engineers completed a Class 30 Bailey bridge on the piers of the demolished Ponte Santa Trinita 200 yards downstream. Thus ended the battle for Florence.

Turning his camera to the left, Sergeant Menzies photographed the blown Ponte alla Carraia. (IWM)

The rebuilt bridge, pictured by Perry Rowe in May 2004.

I am indebted to Perry Rowe for his considerable assistance in preparing this article, especially with the comparison photos. I am also grateful to veterans Ray Curry, Rae Familton and Kurt Hirlinger for their information and to other veterans who made pictures available from their private collections. I also thank Daniele Guglielmi, Claudio Biscarini, Marco Belogi, Roberto Gheri, Lorenzo Sulli and Don Wethey for their help.



Left: **On August 11, the Allies crossed the Arno and occupied the central city on the north bank. Engineers immediately started construction of a Bailey bridge using the remains of the blown Ponte Santa Trinita as a base.** *Right:* **The wartime picture appears to have been taken from the riverbed but Perry had to be content to take it from the road above. (Rowe)**

On February 15, 1944, the US Fifth Air Force despatched a force of 156 light, medium and heavy bombers to the Japanese stronghold base of Kavieng on New Ireland in the south-west Pacific. The strike formed part of a five-day series of attacks on Kavieng designed to wreck the Japanese airfields, seaplane base and harbour facilities there. The raid was the largest on Kavieng so far, but also a costly one, no less than ten aircraft being lost. Kavieng had long been out of reach of Allied land-based medium aircraft but there had been earlier strikes against it, notably on December 25, 1943, when 86 aircraft launched from the US carriers *Bunker Hill* and *Monterey* of Task Group 37.2 attacked Japanese shipping in the harbour. This picture of Grumman TBF torpedo bombers approaching Kavieng from the north was taken during that raid. Note the Japanese airstrip on the left, inland from the town. The four larger islands on the right, forming a natural breakwater for Kavieng harbour from the west are (top to bottom) Usien, Nago, Nusalik and Nusa. (USNA)

THE KAVIENG RAID

By Rodney Pearce, Don Fetterly and Gail Parker

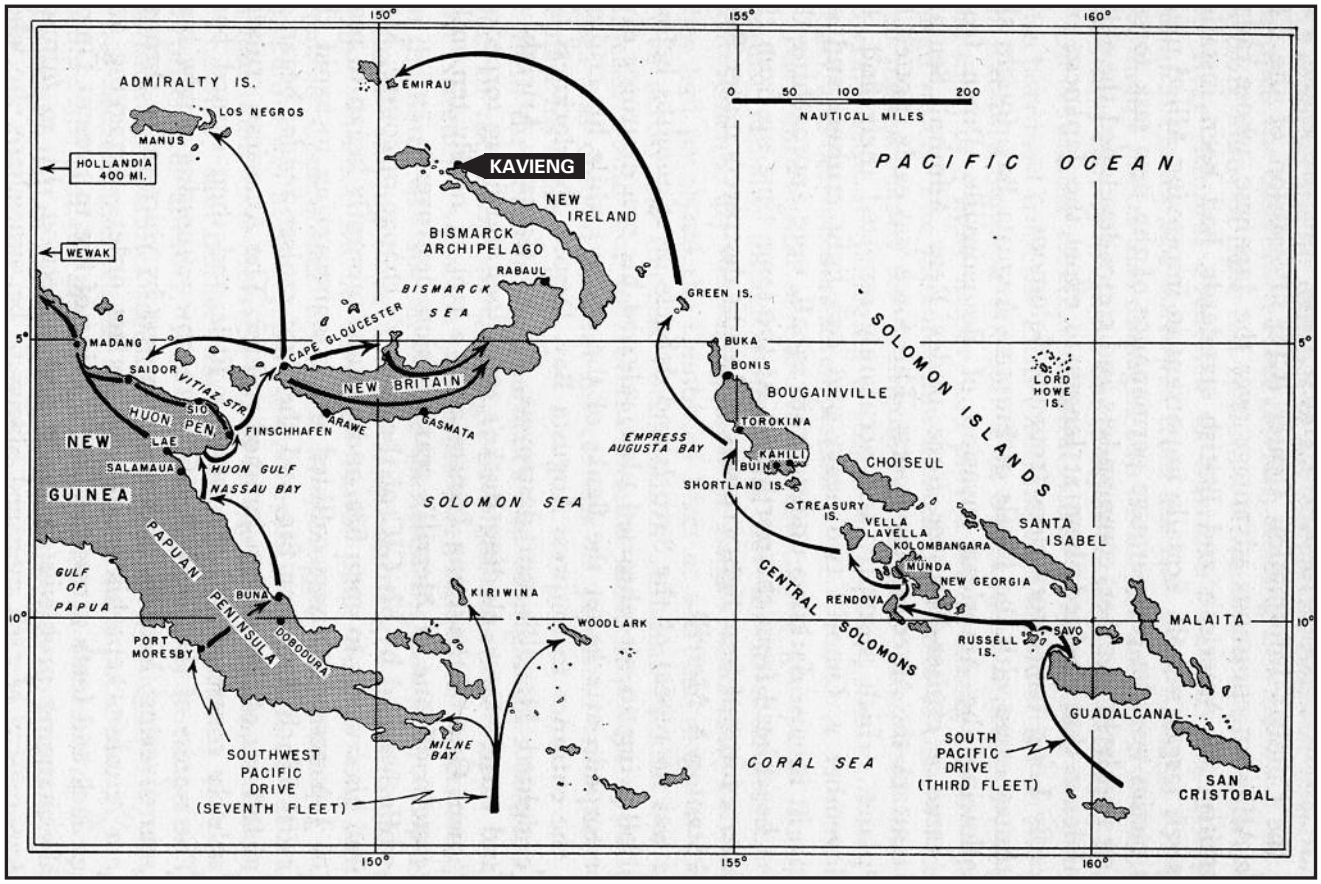
New Ireland is a tropical, jungle-covered island in the southern Pacific. Like New Britain, its sister island just to the south with its great harbour at Rabaul, it forms part of the Bismarck Archipelago and lies just north of Papua New Guinea with the Bismarck Sea in between. About 200 miles long and some 20 miles wide, it stretches from south-east to north-west. At the northern top lies the harbour township of Kavieng.

Kavieng fell to the Japanese forces in January 1942, at the same time as Rabaul in New Britain. Ideally located, it became a stronghold for their air and sea operations, facilitating the many Japanese ships, barges and submarines moving across the Bismarck Sea from the base at Truk and providing easy access to other Japanese bases at Wewak, Hansa Bay and Alexishafen in New Guinea as well as to Rabaul. The Japanese built two airfields on the north-western tip of New Ireland: one at Kavieng itself, operational in August 1942; the other a satellite field at nearby Panapai, finished in April 1943.

Following the Allied conquest of Guadalcanal (see *After the Battle* No. 108) in February 1943, the US South Pacific forces (renamed the US Third Fleet in June) under Admiral William F. Halsey and US South-west Pacific forces (now known as the US Seventh Fleet) under General Douglas C. MacArthur launched their co-ordinated dual drive on Rabaul. Each would advance in a series of island-hopping steps, establishing airfields as they went in order to provide land-based air cover for the next step. Strong pockets of Japanese forces would be bypassed, isolated from their supplies and left to wither away.

On the right, Halsey's forces fought their way up the Solomon Islands, capturing Rendova and New Georgia in June, Vella Lavella in August, and landing in Bougainville in November. There, in six weeks of hard fighting, Halsey's men gained a perimeter wide enough to enable the construction of a fighter and a bomber strip. From these airfields, just 220 miles from Rabaul, Halsey's bombers could now reach the Bismarck Islands.

Nusa, Nusalik, Nago and Usien are prominent in this approximate comparison taken from an Air Niugini flight at lower altitude. (G. Parker)

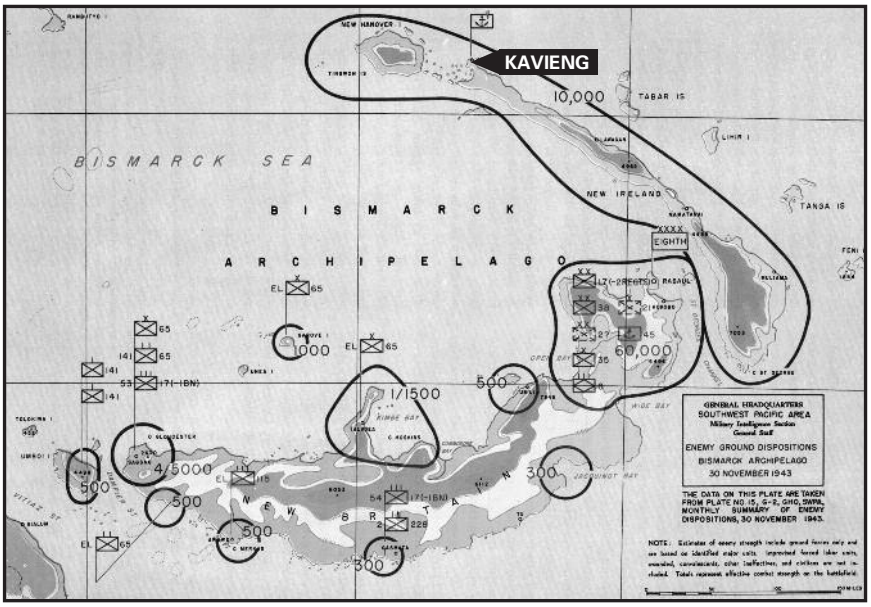


The February attacks on Kavieng were part of the Allied campaign to neutralise and bypass the Japanese stronghold of Rabaul in New Britain. Starting in February 1943 the Americans had begun a two-pronged drive, the US Third Fleet advancing on the right, hopping from island to island in the Solomon Archipelago, and the US Seventh Fleet doing the same on the left, leapfrogging up the northern coast of New Guinea, into New Britain and on to the Admiralty Islands.

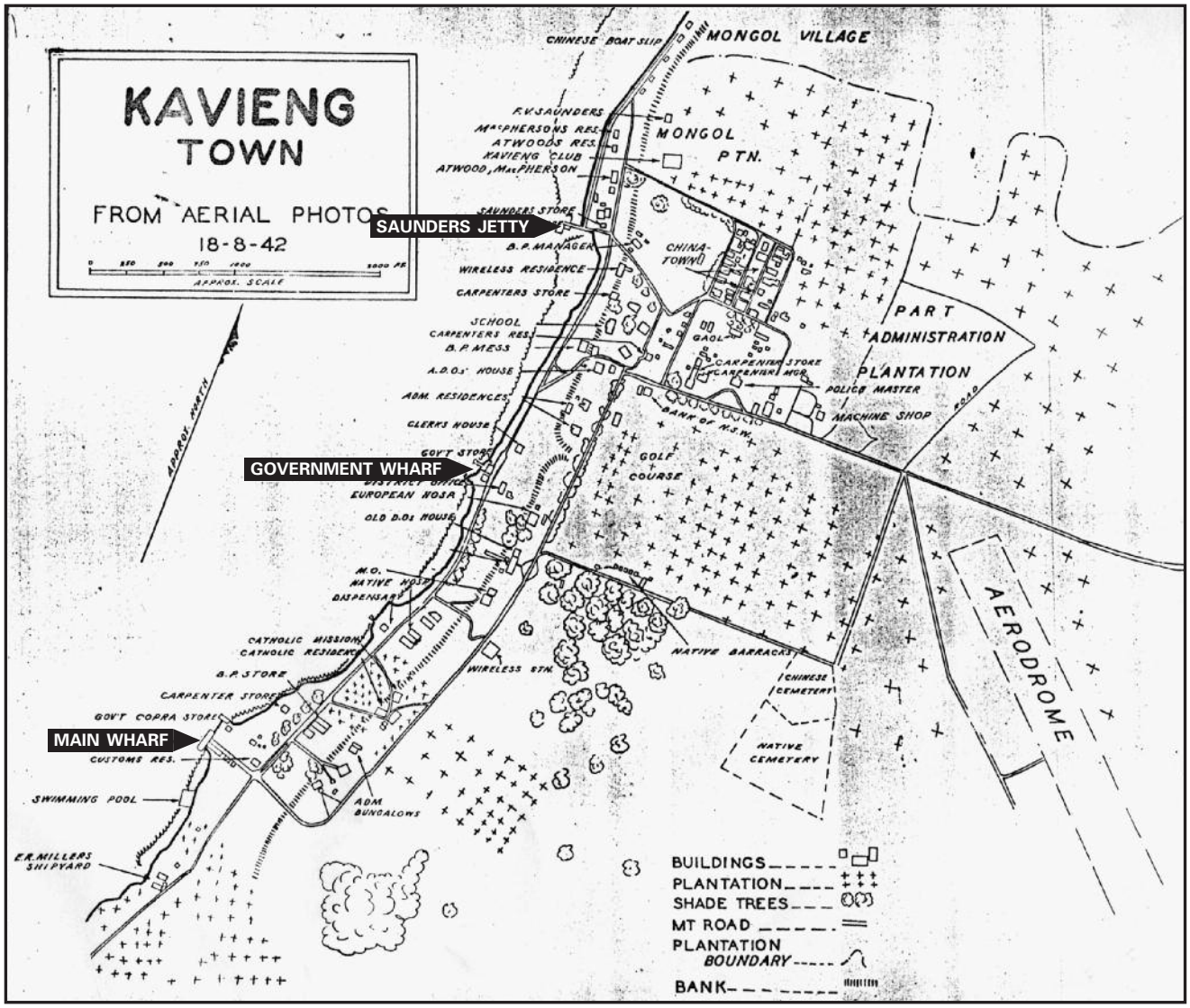
Meanwhile, on the left, MacArthur's forces fought their way westwards along the New Guinea north coast. In June, his Seventh Amphibious Force put troops ashore without opposition on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands off the Papuan Peninsula and at Nassau Bay on the New Guinea north coast. In August, his forces staged a diversion against Salamaua further west along the coast, which drew Japanese troops away from their stronghold at nearby Lae. This was just as MacArthur had hoped, and in early September he put 8,000 men of the Australian 9th Division ashore east of Lae, followed by 1,700 American paratroopers of the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment seizing the airfield to the west of it, which enabled the Australian 7th Division to be flown in for a pincer attack on the city. Then, in late September, the Australian 20th Brigade landed around the tip of the peninsula at Finschhafen (see *After the Battle* No. 113) expelling the Japanese garrison. Before advancing further westward through Vitiaz Strait (the narrows between New Guinea and New Britain), MacArthur wanted to secure both shores so in December the US 1st Marine Division stormed Cape Gloucester in New Britain, capturing the airfield and chasing the Japanese defenders back almost to Rabaul.

Rather than capturing Rabaul, Allied strategy aimed at neutralising the Japanese base by bypassing it and pounding it into impotence from the air. In building their ring of steel around the enemy stronghold, the Allies had to decide what to do about New Ireland and the Japanese base at Kavieng. The Allied planners initially envisaged Kavieng to be seized and occupied, the idea being to turn it into a major air base with six airfields and a minor fleet base. However, as Kavieng was strongly defended, plans for invasion switched to the Saint Mathias Islands, 70 miles to the north-west. Only one of these had a small Japanese presence. The Allies decided to occupy one of the other islands, Emirau, and turn it into an operational base including an airfield, wharves and storage facilities.

Halsey's assault against Emirau was planned for March 1944 but, before that, both he and MacArthur would launch other operations to complete the isolation of Rabaul. Halsey would put troops ashore at Nissan Island, part of the Green Islands which lie just over 100 miles east of Rabaul and some 200 miles to the south-east of Kavieng, and MacArthur would invade the Admiralty Islands, 350 miles north-west of Rabaul and 200 miles west of Kavieng.



Holding the Bismarck Archipelago was the Japanese 8th Area Army under Lieutenant-General Hitoshi Imamura with a total ground strength of some 80,000 troops. Of these, 60,000 were concentrated in the Rabaul area on New Britain while 10,000 were dispersed over New Ireland and New Hanover. Most were employed in the protection of airfields and harbours.

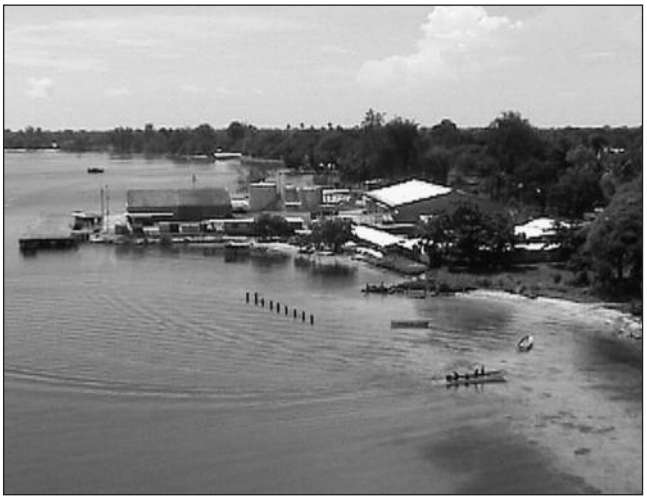


Beside its two inland airstrips and the floatplane base at its southern end (just off this plan — see the map on page 44), Kavieng offered the Japanese vital harbour services. Facilities at the township included three wharfs (from south to north: Main Wharf, Government Wharf and Saunders Jetty), numerous workshops and a wireless station.

On February 11, 1944, Major General George C. Kenney's US Fifth Air Force, operating from air bases in the Papuan Peninsula, launched a series of heavy raids against Kavieng and its two airfields, designed to support both Admiral Halsey's landing on Nissan Island on February 15 and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz's Third Fleet's carrier operation against Truk on February 16 and 17 and also to protect the right flank of MacArthur's Admiralty Islands operation, planned to begin on February 29.

Taking part in these raids were six groups belonging to the Fifth Air Force's Advanced Echelon (Advon): the 43rd Bomb Group ('Ken's Men') and 90th Bomb Group ('The Jolly Rogers') equipped with B-24 Liberator heavy bombers; the 345th Bomb Group

An oblique aerial photo of Kavieng. The view is northwards with Main Wharf on the left.



Main Wharf as it looks today, pictured by our author Don Fetterly from a helicopter in May 2004.

First over the target! The February 15 attack on Kavieng harbour was led by the A-20 Havocs of the 3rd Bomb Group, with the 8th Squadron in the lead. This spectacular shot was taken by the aft-looking strike camera of the Havoc flown by the squadron commander, Captain Charles W. Howe, as he led the first wave in bombing and strafing the Japanese floatplane base at the southern end of Kavieng. The four biplanes moored in the foreground are Mitsubishi F1M 'Petes', the two monoplanes at the far end are Aichi E13A 'Jakes'. All belonged to the 958th Kokutai (Naval Air Group). Smoke is billowing up from the 'Pete' closest to the 'Jakes', which has been hit. (E. Shook)

('The Air Apaches') and 38th Bomb Group ('The Sun Setters') with B-25 Mitchell medium bombers; the 3rd Bomb Group ('The Grim Reapers') with A-20 Havoc light bombers, and the 475th Fighter Group ('Satan's Angels') with P-38 Lightning escorting fighters. The bombers were all based at advanced airfields on the north-eastern shore of the Papuan Peninsula, the B-24s and B-25s at airfields in the Dobodura area and the A-20s at Nadzab. The fighters operated from airstrips at Finschhafen. The newly captured airfield at Cape Gloucester on New Britain served as emergency field for landings of battle-damaged aircraft.

On February 11, 48 B-24 heavies of the 43rd and 90th Groups, flying out of Dobodura with an escort of P-38s, reached Kavieng to find Japanese aircraft warming up on the apron; 170 tons of bombs were dropped on the airfield and revetment area. Two days later, on February 13, the same two groups returned with 35 B-24s, escorted by 32 P-38s, their bombs putting the Kavieng runway out of service. Next day, February 14, the Kavieng field was hit again, but the main effort of the 43 Liberators attacking that day was put on Panapai, the other airfield nearby.

The air strikes climaxed on February 15 with an all-out effort by all groups, designed to knock out the remaining aerodrome and the port facilities. First, 36 B-24 heavies of the 43rd and 90th Groups would hit Panapai airfield, their chief aim being to keep Japanese fighters from interfering with the main attack on the town and harbour. Next, four squadrons of A-20s from the 3rd Bomb Group — 48 aircraft in all — would attack shipping in Kavieng harbour, the floatplane base at the southern end of Kavieng and the town's Main Wharf. Finally, seven squadrons of B-25s from the 38th and 345th Groups — 72 aircraft in all — would bomb Kavieng town and stores along the harbour front. Sixty-one P-38s of the 475th Fighter Group would provide escort and cover. It was anticipated that this would be a difficult operation but nobody expected that it would result in some of the worst combat losses for the Fifth Air Force's low-level skip-bombers and strafers.

In the early morning of the 15th the various bomber squadrons began taking off from their bases. Take-off for the B-24 groups from Dobodura preceded that of the other groups enabling them to reach their objective, the Panapai fighter airfield, before the others arrived.

The A-20s of the 3rd Bomb Group, leading the harbour strike force, departed from two different airfields. The 13th, 89th and 90th Squadrons took off from Nadzab, the group's normal base, but the 8th Squadron staged out of Finschhafen, closer to the target, having flown there the previous day. This was because their model A-20G-10s carried 100 gallons less fuel than the upgraded A-20G-25s that equipped the other squadrons, and to reach Kavieng they had to shorten the distance.

The B-25s of the 345th and 38th Bomb Groups assembled over Horanda (Dobodura Airstrip No. 7) at 1,500 feet at 0745 hours (local time). The operation got off to a bad start when Mitchell 41-30317 piloted by 1st Lieutenant John D. Wilson of the 499th Squadron (345th Bomb Group) had an engine failure on take-off and crashed into jungle at the end of the runway, killing all six members of the crew.

With the 38th Group in the lead the formation of B-25s proceeded up the coast to Sakar Island and thence to Sand Island where they rendezvoused with two squadrons of P-38 fighters of the 475th Fighter Group at 1010 hours at 2,000 feet as planned. Sand Island was chosen to avoid the Japanese radar on Unea Island, 30 miles to the south-east. A wide left 'S' turn was made around the eastern end of Dyaul Island to avoid a possible enemy radar on the western tip of the island (radar range was 15 miles). Landfall on New Ireland was made at a point five miles west of Kaut Bay on the south shore about 30 miles south-east of Kavieng. The approach was across Balgai Bay, then around Cape Siwusat, along the coast to the target itself.

As the A-20s and B-25s were approaching Kavieng harbour, the B-24 heavies attacked Panapai airfield to suppress enemy fighter interference. Of the 36 Liberators dispatched, only the 19 of the 90th Bomb Group reached and bombed the target; 17 others, prevented by weather from reaching Panapai, bombed a secondary target, Talasea on New Britain.

The main raid on Kavieng harbour began at 0950 (local time). First to strike were the 48 Havocs from the 3rd Bomb Group, whose targets were shipping in the harbour, the floatplane base and shore installations. Unlike the mediums who would strike south to north, the 3rd Bomb Group came in from overland heading east to west. Spearheading the attack was the 8th Squadron who came swooping in 12 abreast attacking shipping in the harbour.

As he flashed across the harbour at 50 feet, the squadron commander, Captain Charles W. Howe, dropped one 500lb bomb on an armed Japanese freighter, scoring a direct hit amidships which blew a large hole in the starboard side of the vessel and left it billowing black smoke. In addition the squadron's bombs and strafing bullets destroyed a lugger and a large barge, wrecked a floatplane and demolished a large building on Nusalik Island.

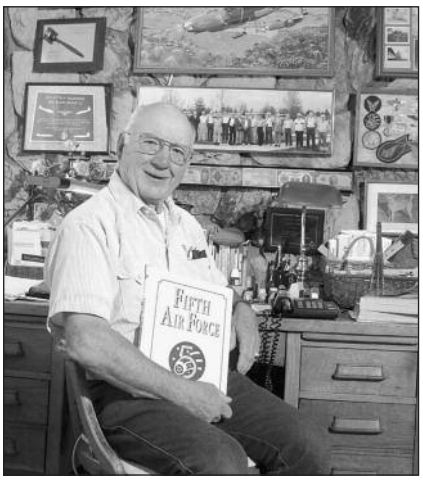
With smoke rising from bombed and strafed targets, the 8th Squadron passes over the northern end of Nusalik Island. At the far left is the column of black smoke boiling up from the burning 'Pete' floatplane. (J. Sturla)

Large-calibre Japanese anti-aircraft shells explode over the water as the 8th Squadron races out to open sea. The view is back to the target with Nusa Island on the left, Nusalik Island on the right and Kavieng harbour on the horizon. Some flak is visible over targets in Kavieng under attack by the other squadrons of the 3rd Bomb Group. (J. Sturla)

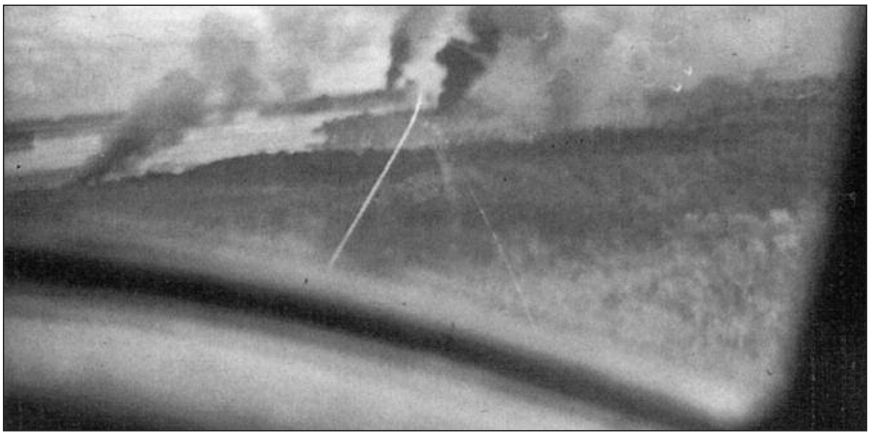
Second Lieutenant Richard J. Sturla was flying an A-20 on the right-hand side of the 8th Squadron. He had already dropped a couple of bombs and was zeroing in on a group of small boats when his bomber was suddenly hit by a huge waterspout caused by a large-calibre enemy shell landing in the water below. The water strike blew away three feet of tailplane and made the aircraft suddenly go up and out of control. After regaining control, Sturla reduced air speed to 125mph to keep the damaged bomber from shaking apart but as a result he fell behind the rest of the squadron on the way back. Not missed for quite a while, Sturla flew on to make an emergency landing at Finschhafen.

The 3rd Group lost two aircraft over Kavieng, both of the 13th Squadron. Havoc 42-86728, piloted by 2nd Lieutenant Sam Norris, was hit by Japanese anti-aircraft fire. Enveloped in smoke and flame as it came off the target, the bomber crossed the north coast of Nusa Island before crashing into the sea 200 yards off shore, exploding on impact. All three men on board were killed. Havoc 42-86616, piloted by 1st Lieutenant William T. Pearson, had its right-hand engine set on fire over the target by a bursting bomb from the preceding aircraft. It tried to make a water landing about 35 miles from Kavieng but broke into three pieces on contact, killing both crew members.

Two additional A-20s of the 3rd Bomb Group were badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire but made it back to New Guinea without loss of life. One crash-landed at Nadzab and the other, like Jack Sturla, made an emergency landing at Finschhafen. The Grim Reapers dropped a total of 81,700 pounds of 300lb and 500lb delayed-action bombs and fired 46,550 rounds of .50-calibre ammunition on the target.



Former 2nd Lieutenant 'Jack' Sturla of the 8th Squadron, whose A-20 was heavily damaged over Kavieng and who barely made it back to Finschhafen. (J. M. Mohs)



Right: **Over an hour after the A-20 Havoc light bombers had attacked, the B-25 Mitchell mediums of the 38th and 345th Bomb Groups arrived over Kavieng to add to the destruction. This is the sight that confronted the 498th Squadron — the third squadron of the 345th Bomb Group to go in — as it approached the target from the south-east. The photograph was taken through the windshield with a hand-held camera by 1st Lieutenant Anthony Buchwald, co-pilot of 1st Lieutenant Garvice McCall's B-25 *Near Miss*. Smoke from the supply and fuel dumps hit by the five squadrons preceding the 498th billow up from the shoreline beyond the jungle. The light-coloured streaks are the paths of tracer bullets fired from the aircraft's .50-calibre nose guns. (J. P. Bronson)**

After the A-20s had left, there was a pause of over an hour before the arrival of the second wave, the B-25 mediums, who attacked south to north, their breakaway point after the bomb run being between Cape Nuan and North Cape. First over the target, at 1113, were the 24 Mitchells of the 38th Bomb Group (71st, 405th and 823rd Squadrons), focusing on the wharfs and other shore installations. The attack formation for each squadron was two flights of four bombers each. Swooping in low over the tree tops, strafing and dropping 500lb bombs, the Sun Setters lost two aircraft and seven men to the accurate anti-aircraft fire.

Two of the 345th Group's squadrons — first the 501st, then the 498th — attacked the floatplane base already hit by the 3rd Bomb Group's 8th Squadron an hour and a half earlier. This shot, taken from a Mitchell according to its official caption, shows the same floatplanes as seen in the strike picture from Captain Howe's Havoc. Black smoke is still rising from the burning 'Pete'. (AWM)

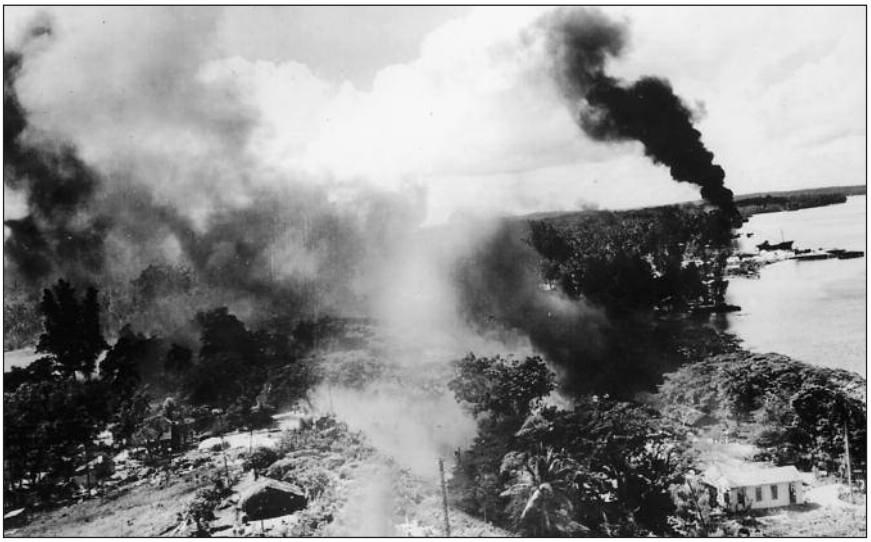
The former floatplane base at the southern end of Kavieng township is today a fish-processing plant. This shot, taken by Don Fetterly from a helicopter in May 2004, is taken looking in the opposite direction from the wartime photos.

Mitchell 42-64873 of the 823rd Squadron, piloted by 1st Lieutenant John H. DiFilippo, crashed and exploded on the beach to the west of Kavieng's Chinatown, killing all five crewmen.

Mitchell 41-30306 *Pissonit* of the 71st Squadron, piloted by 1st Lieutenant Frank E. Benson, was hit by AA fire which knocked out one engine and set the aircraft on fire. Benson ditched the aircraft about a mile from the shore, but two of his crew perished. The tail gunner, Sergeant Albert Gross, died when he tried to parachute at low altitude to escape the flames. The radioman, Tech Sergeant J. C. Healan, was swept out a lower hatchway on impact and drowned. This was merciful as Healan was behind the fire and had been hideously burned. Benson and the other two crew members, 2nd Lieutenant William J. Smith (co-pilot) and 2nd Lieutenant Holly Rushing (navigator), got away from the burning plane, which was sinking quickly. Their life raft was on fire, so the three men stayed in the water, keeping afloat by their Mae West life vests.

The Sun Setters dropped a total of 125 500lb delayed-action bombs and expended 48,050 rounds of .50-calibre and 4,250 rounds of .30-calibre ammunition strafing the target.

Right: **Another shot from an unidentified Mitchell as it passes over the northern half of Kavieng. The smoke plume in the right background is from a freighter set on fire by the 38th Bomb Group. Just in front of the smoke is a small lugger at Main Wharf. (AWM)**



Right on the heels of the 38th Bomb Group, at 1125, came the 45 Mitchells of the 345th Bomb Group. They swooped in at tree-top level with the 500th Squadron (11 aircraft) in the lead, followed by the 501st (11 aircraft), 498th (12 aircraft) and 499th (11 aircraft). Two pilots had turned back prior to reaching the target: 1st Lieutenant William A. James flying 41-30430 of the 500th Squadron due to turret failure and 1st Lieutenant John E. McKinney flying 41-30099 *The Wolf Pack* of the 501st due to mechanical problems. The group dropped a total of 201 500lb delayed-action bombs on the target, and thoroughly strafed the area with 70,745 rounds of .50-calibre and 8,025 rounds of .30-calibre ammunition.

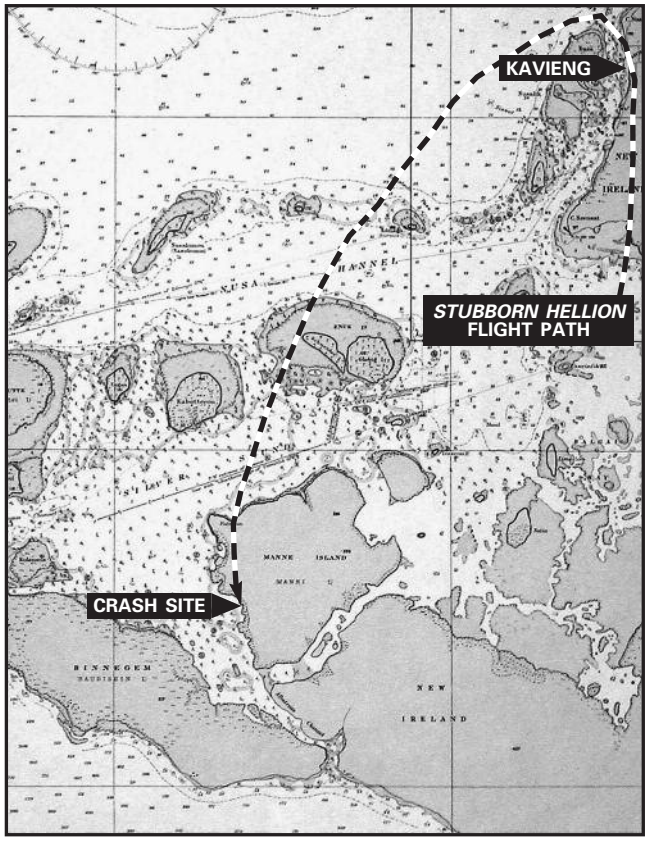
Above: **A marvellous overview of the attacked area, photographed looking south by the aft-looking camera aboard 41-30161 *Avoca Avenger* of the 500th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lieutenant William H. Ames. The same smoke plume seen in the previous picture is visible in the far distance, as is the burning freighter itself. The jetty sticking out in middle distance is Main Wharf and just visible at the bottom of the picture is part of Government Wharf. Waves circle out from a bomb that has hit the water. (M. J. Eppstein)** *Right:* **Don Fetterly photographed the same shoreline from a helicopter in 2004, but from a point a little further north, the landing stage in the foreground being Saunders Jetty. The altitude is commensurate with that of the 1944 attack, some of the 345th Group Mitchells making their run below the ridge height.**

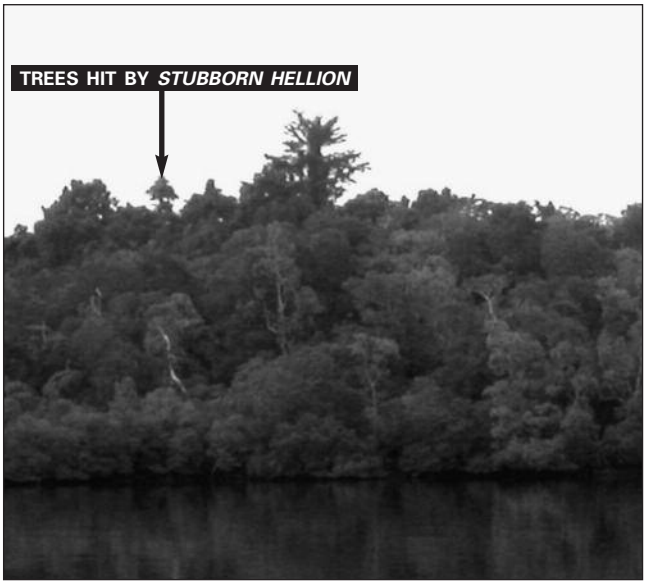
One of the four aircraft lost by the 345th Group over Kavieng was 42-32314 *Stubborn Hellion* (note the painted mustang head) of the 500th Squadron, flown by Captain Mike Hochella. The girl is Dots Fields, a nurse. (M. F. Hochella)

Spearheading the 345th Group's attack, and leading the 1st Element of his squadron's 'A' Flight, was the 500th Squadron commander, Captain Max H. Mortensen, in 41-30055 *Rita's Wagon*. One of Mortensen's bombs hit a Japanese fuel dump, setting off a huge blast, which sent 55-gallon drums of gasoline arching gracefully through the formation of low-flying B-25s. Pilots of aircraft coming up behind had to manoeuvre to avoid the flaming drums, which in some cases forced them to expose themselves more to Japanese anti-aircraft batteries. One of the drums launched skyward collided with 41-30592 *Mexican Spitfire* of the 500th Squadron's 'B' Flight, taking out some three feet of the right outboard wing's leading edge. The pilot, 1st Lieutenant Francis P. Doman, managed to keep the bomber airborne long enough to reach Finschhafen, where he made an emergency landing without casualties.

The Air Apaches had the highest losses of all groups, losing four aircraft and seven men over the target. Hardest hit was again the 500th Squadron, which had three aircraft shot down, all three of them flight leaders.

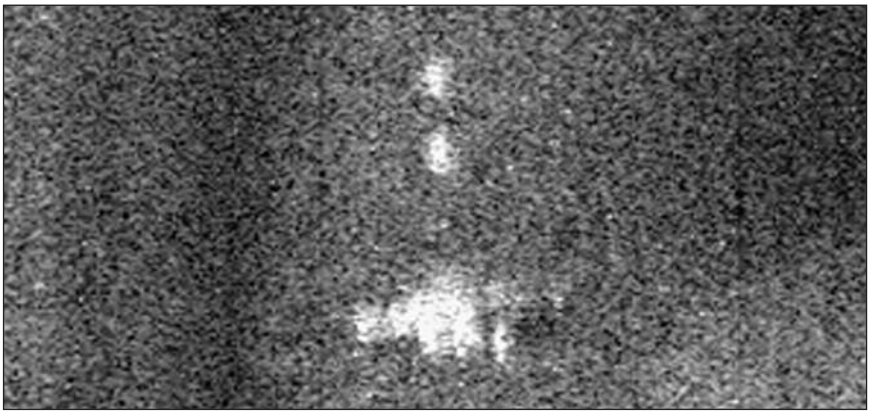
Flying on Captain Mortensen's right, leading the 2nd Element of the squadron's 'A' Flight, was 42-32314 *Stubborn Hellion* piloted by Captain Michael F. Hochella. Heavily hit by Japanese anti-aircraft fire, it had one engine set on fire which resulted in it ditching just off Manne Island, about ten miles south-east of Kavieng harbour. The navigator, 1st Lieutenant John J. Howard, perished in the crash but the other five crewmen — Captain Hochella, 2nd Lieutenant William H. Bright (co-pilot), Sergeant Samuel Kellar Jr. (top turret gunner), Private Clyde R. Lambert (radio operator/waist gunner) and Staff Sergeant Elmore C. Stephens (engineer) — managed to get ashore on Selapiu Island, 5.5 miles from the crash site. All were injured. On February 17, two days after the raid, they were rescued by Lieutenant Orazio Simonelli of Navy rescue patrol squadron VPB-34 who picked them up in his Catalina flying boat despite having earlier lost his fighter escort. Simonelli was later awarded the Navy Cross for his bravery.

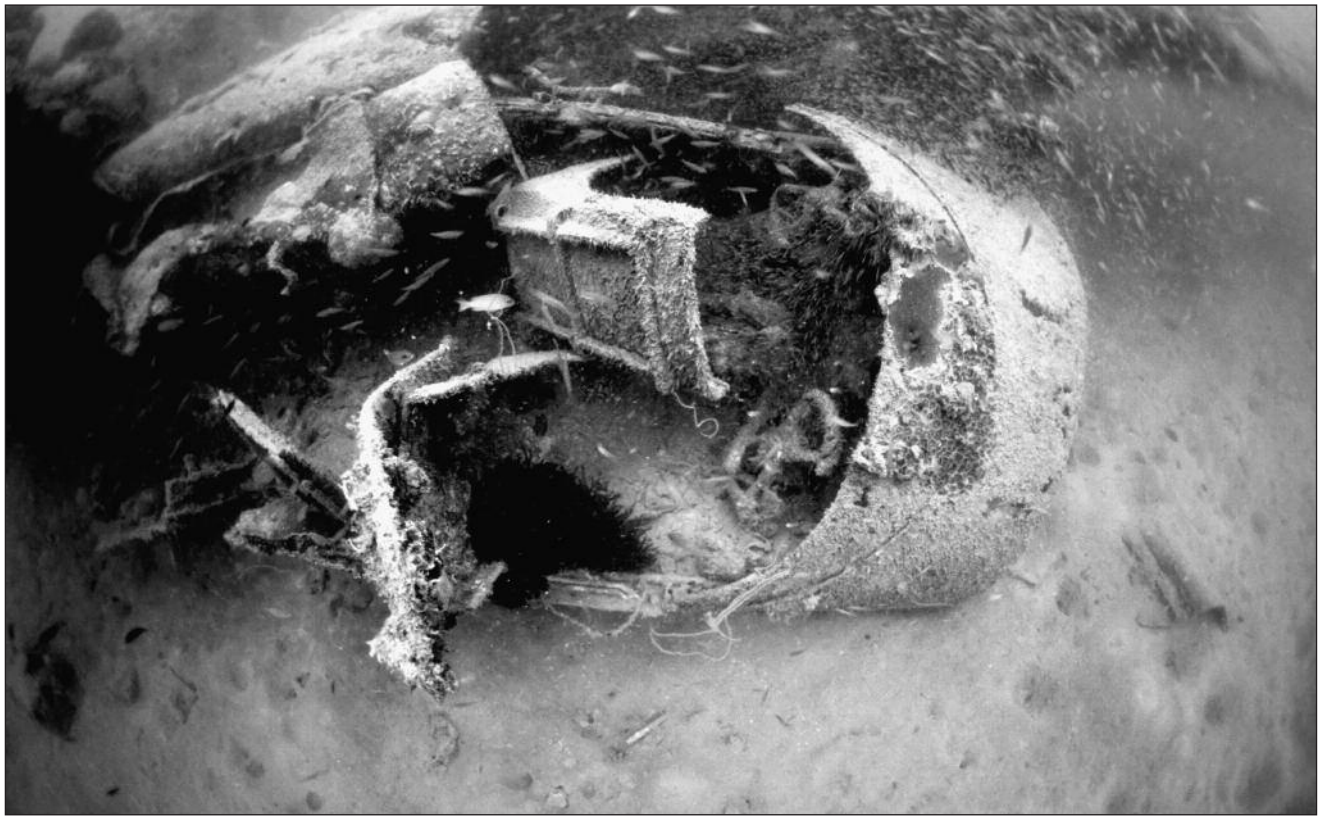




Left: **After being hit over the target the Mitchell managed a left-hand turn and flew just above the water as far as possible before it became apparent that it would have to be put down. By then the aircraft was approaching Manne Island flying nearly due south. Realising he could not manoeuvre around the tip of the island, Captain Hochella pulled back on the stick to gain altitude. Clipping the trees on the south-west coast of the island the aircraft lost its nose cone, containing the forward-firing .50-calibre machine guns, and went out of control and into a flat spin.** *Above:* **Sixty years later one can still see where the bomber struck the trees.**

On hitting the water, the aircraft buckled just behind the top turret gun and both engines came off. Today the wreck of *Stubborn Hellion* rest about 20 metres from the shoreline south-east of Patitaun Point — a unique relic of the Kavieng raid. The wreck was first discovered in the mid-1990s by an American, Charles Jenkins, who at that time was working in the area for SIL International (formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics), an organisation translating the Bible into the local Tigak language. Some locals showed Jenkins its whereabouts. Subsequent recovery of the aircraft's ID plate facilitated its identification as 42-32314. *Right:* **Sonar images clearly show the broken fuselage with the two engines lying nearby.**





Our author Rod Pearce, owner of Niugini Diving, has explored WW II wrecks throughout Papua New Guinea for over 30 years. The location of *Stubborn Hellion* was first shown to him by a local dive operator on June 2, 2001, and he now regularly takes divers down to the wreck which lies at some ten metres below the surface. These underwater photos were taken by Marc Montocchio from South Africa. *Above:* **The cockpit, minus the nose cone and with its roof peeled back giving a clear view of the controls and the armour plate behind the pilot's seat.** *Right:* **The top turret gun, bent sideways and with its Perspex covering gone but still mounting its twin .50-calibre guns. Most of the year the underwater visibility of this site is only about 5-10 metres but on some exceptional days visibility can be up to 20 metres. In 2002 two of Rod's female staff, Daisy Eliah and Jessy Pierse, walked into the mangrove swamp adjacent to the aircraft looking for mud crabs, and found metal debris that must have come from *Stubborn Hellion* as there is no other apparent source. It was almost completely covered in mud and 60 years of growth and hidden some 400 metres from the rest of the aircraft.**

***Stubborn Hellion*'s navigator, 1st Lieutenant John J. Howard, was never recovered but it is hoped that the US Army's Joint POW/MIA All Accounting Command (JPAC) — the former Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI) — in Hawaii will carry out a search for his remains in the near future.**

Left: **Another 500th Squadron Mitchell to go down was 41-30531, piloted by Captain William Cavoli, here pictured in his cockpit pointing at the bomb score-card marking his 14 combat missions. With his aircraft heavily damaged and set alight by enemy anti-aircraft fire, Cavoli ditched it off Cape Nuan, just north-west of Kavieng. All six crewmen managed to get clear of the rapidly sinking aircraft.** *Right:* **Bill Cavoli pictured in December 2004. (K. Rubin)**

It was the 500th's second wave of six aircraft that took the brunt of the AA fire. Mitchell 41-29992 *Jack Rabbit Express*, piloted by 1st Lieutenant Thane C. Hecox, was leading the 1st Element of 'B' Flight when it was shot down in flames and plunged directly into a palm grove from 50 feet, killing all six men on board.

Leading the 2nd Element of 'B' Flight and flying just abreast and on the right of Hecox's element was Captain William J. Cavoli, Operations Officer of the 500th, in Mitchell 41-30531. After strafing at tree-top level, Cavoli pulled up to approximately 100 feet for the bomb run. Due to the thick black smoke over Chinatown caused by the bombs from the 38th Bomb Group and the leading flight of the 500th, Cavoli was forced to fly by his instruments while crossing the target. It was at this point that his right engine was hit by ground fire and burst into flames. Manifold pressure dropped to zero. Cavoli immediately tried to feather the right prop. As he did so, the engine started up again. He gave the left engine full power. Slipping the aircraft in a vain attempt to put out the terrific fire that had started, he again attempted to feather the right engine prop but to no avail as the flames spread over the wing. The bomber was losing altitude all the time and the fire had already melted away half the right engine nacelle, the right flap and the whole right side of the fuselage. The right wheel had dropped out of the nacelle and caught fire and Cavoli was unable to close the bomb bay doors or drop any flaps because of hydraulic failure. The airspeed indicator was no longer working.

A crash landing was inevitable and Cavoli knew he had only seconds before the aircraft would explode, so he hastened to get it down onto the water to extinguish the flames. He levelled off just a few feet above the water and kept holding it off in the prescribed tail-down ditching position until the tail hit the water. As it struck, the right wheel snapped off and flew back and broke off the right vertical stabiliser and rudder. The plane skipped twice and then made the final plunge nose first. The time was 1130.

The cockpit immediately filled with water. Sergeant Weldon Isler, the engineer, pulled the escape hatch and then the life raft release. He, Cavoli, 2nd Lieutenant George H. Braun, the co-pilot and 1st Lieutenant Robert E. Lewis, the navigator, escaped through the hatch. They all climbed on the right wing and called for Staff Sergeant John A. Murphy, the top turret gunner, to come to them. Murphy was swimming on the left side of the aircraft having escaped underwater from the turret after it had been torn loose in the crash and sucked out the bottom of the aircraft. They then heard Tech Sergeant Thomas B. Freeman, the radio operator/waist gunner, yelling for help. He was pinned in near the rear escape hatch with his right arm broken and his parachute still on. Cavoli and Isler rowed their life raft to the bomber's side window and after removing Freeman's 'chute, managed to pull him through the small opening and into the raft.

As the six men rowed away in two life rafts the aircraft sank. It had remained afloat for about four and a half minutes. At this point they noticed they were about three-quarters of a mile north of Cape Nuan. They rowed perhaps another mile away from the shore, hoping to be spotted by a rescue plane.

The fourth and last B-25 lost by the 345th Bomb Group over Kavieng was 41-30041 *Gremlins Holiday* of the 498th Squadron. Flown by 1st Lieutenant Edgar R. Cavin, the bomber was hit by AA fire while manoeuvring to avoid the barrels of flaming gasoline shooting up through the formation from the fuel dump directly ahead. The right engine was hit and the ensuing fire forced Cavin to ditch north-west of Nusa Island after dropping his bombs on the target area. The six men aboard *Gremlins Holiday* (Cavin was carrying an unauthorised passenger, Captain Robert G. Huff, the Squadron Adjutant), three of them badly injured, managed to escape from the aircraft before it sank and scramble into three life rafts.

Fourth and last B-25 lost by the 345th Group was 41-30041 *Gremlins Holiday* of the 498th Squadron, which was hit by Japanese flak and forced to ditch north-west of Nusa Island. The original crew of *Gremlins Holiday* posed for their picture at Port Moresby at the end of July 1943 (L-R): Staff Sergeant David B. McCready, top turret gunner; Tech Sergeant Fred E. Arnett, radio operator/waist gunner; Staff Sergeant Norman E. Ables, engineer/gunner; 1st Lieutenant Edroy G. Flom, bombardier/navigator; 2nd Lieutenant Levi A. Barnes, co-pilot, and 1st Lieutenant Edgar R. Cavin, pilot. Ables, Barnes and Flom were not aboard the aircraft during the Kavieng raid, having been replaced by Staff Sergeant Lawrence E. Herbst, 2nd Lieutenant Elmer J. Kirtland and an unauthorised passenger, Squadron Adjutant Captain Robert G. Huff, respectively. (R. G. Huff)

In an action that would win him the Medal of Honor, 1st Lieutenant Nathan G. Gordon *(below)*, **commander of a Catalina flying boat of Navy patrol squadron VPB-34, flew into Kavieng harbour after the raid and made four separate landings and take-offs — in heavy swells, close to shore and under intense Japanese fire — and rescued the survivors of three ditched Mitchells, 15 men in all.** *Above:* **Gordon and his nine-man crew posing at their Catalina a few days after the operation. (USNA)**

Breaking away between Cape Nuan and North Cape, the 345th Mitchells headed for the planned rally point over water 10-15 miles west of Kavieng from where they would return home via Sand Island, through Dampier Strait and past Finschhafen, landing back at Dobodura around 1400 hours.

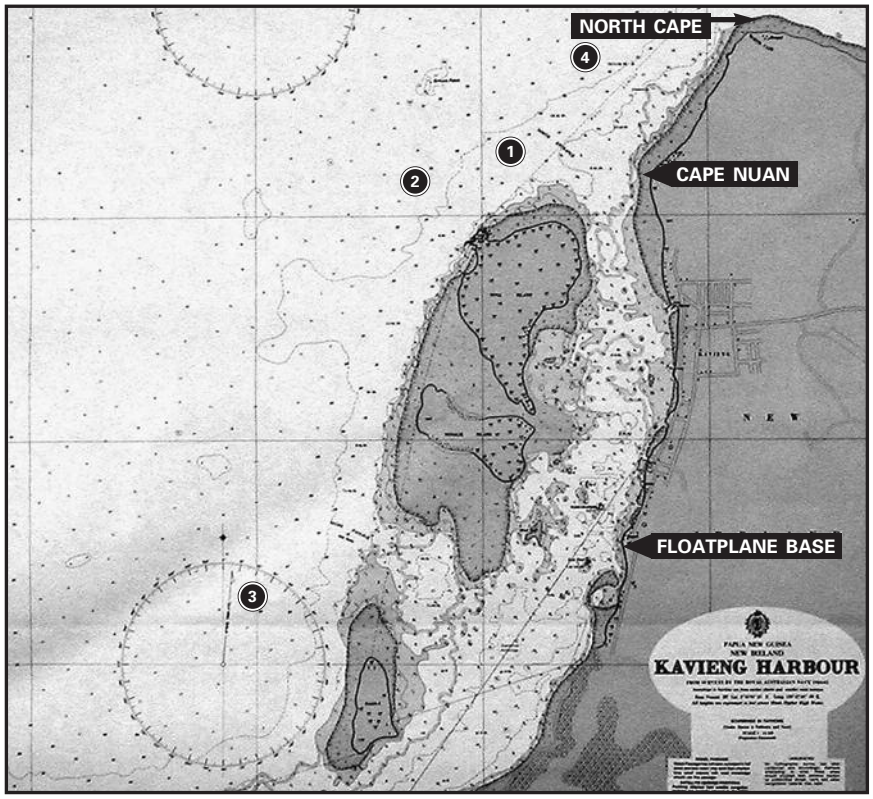
In all, eight aircraft had been brought down by Japanese anti-aircraft fire over Kavieng. Three of them, all B-25s, had been forced to ditch in the sea. In what has been called one of the 'most striking rescues of the war' an air/sea rescue PBY Catalina flying boat of Navy rescue patrol squadron VPB-34 picked up 15 of the crew members, making four separate landings and take-offs under Japanese fire. Catalina 08434 *The Arkansas Traveller,* piloted by Lieutenant Nathan G. Gordon (the aircraft was named after the pilot's home state), was orbiting near the Vitu Islands, 100 miles south-west of Kavieng, when a call came in about an A-20 down about 35 miles south-west of Kavieng. (This was Pearson's 42-86616 of the 13th Squadron.) Along with his escort of four P-47 Thunderbolts from the 348th Fighter Group *The Arkansas Traveller* flew to the area of the reported crash. On the way, the crew spotted a straggler A-20 from the 8th Squadron, 3rd Bomb Group. It was 2nd Lieutenant Jack Sturla, limping back to Finschhafen in his damaged Havoc. Gordon called over the radio to see if they needed assistance, but Sturla replied they were OK. Once over the area of the reported crash, the Catalina began conducting a search, but without any results.

Meanwhile, one of the B-25 pilots, Captain Anthony H. Chiappe of the 498th Squadron (the Squadron Operations Officer), flying 41-30036 *Old Baldy*, having spotted one of the downed crews in the water off Kavieng harbour, was trying to raise the Catalina on his radio to tell them about it. Unable to make contact, Chiappe and his wingman, 1st Lieutenant Joe F. Armijo in 41-30030 *Hon Bun*, set off southward in search of the rescue aircraft. Having found *Arkansas Traveller* and the escort fighters, but still unable to contact the PBY by radio, Chiappe buzzed the flying boat to get it to follow. When this also failed, Chiappe flew alongside, using hand signals to indicate that Gordon should tag on. Some 40 minutes after the attack, the rescue flight arrived at Kavieng. Smoke was billowing from the burning Japanese base.

First Lieutenant Nathan Gordon. (AWM)

Looking around for ditched aircraft, Gordon's crew spotted a large area of marker dye, some wreckage and a half-inflated life raft. (These were the remains of Norris's A-20 of the 13th Squadron.) Although there was no sign of life around the raft, Gordon knew that a human head bobbing in the water could be easily missed from the air, so he went down to investigate. Because of the large swells in the water, he tried to align the plane with the swells so that he could land with them in the same direction. To judge the wind, he dropped a smoke bomb at one end and another down at the far end of where he wanted to land, then went in between the swells. He made a good landing by power stalling the plane, bringing it in really slow and cutting the power so the aircraft dropped out of the sky straight down to land in the shortest distance. When the plane hit the water, the crew reported that some rivets had popped out of the bottom pontoon! Water came in around the seams and drained into the bilges but the PBY stayed afloat. There were no airmen in the water around the raft. Gordon taxied around it to make sure, then lifted back into the air.

No sooner was the Catalina airborne when Gordon received a message — relayed through the P-47 escorts — from Major Chester A. Coltharp, commander of the 498th Bomb Squadron, flying 41-30176 *Princess Pat*, who was circling in the area looking for survivors. Coltharp was relaying messages from two of his pilots — 1st Lieutenant Melvin L. Best, flying 41-30063 *Rose in Bloom* and 1st Lieutenant Earl J. Hitt in 41-30040 *Hitt & Miss* — both of whom had reported spotting six men in three life rafts close to shore north-west of Nusa Island. This was the crew of Cavin's B-25 *Gremlins Holiday*. Once again, the Catalina landed in the heavy swells and taxied over to the rafts. They threw a rope to the occupants but with



Gordon's first landing [1] was at the crash site of Lieutenant Norris's A-20 Havoc 42-86728 of the 13th Squadron, where the Catalina crew thought they had seen one man in the water. However, they found no one. At his second landing [2], he picked up the six men from Lieutenant Cavin's B-25 *Gremlins Holiday* of the 498th Squadron; at his third [3] three survivors from Lieutenant Benson's B-25 *Pissonit* of the 71st Squadron, and at his fourth [4] six men from Captain Cavoli's Mitchell 41-30531 of the 500th Squadron.

the flying boat's two engines running they could not get the rafts close enough to pull the men aboard, so Gordon cut both engines. The rafts came alongside and the six badly injured men — Lieutenant Cavin, 2nd Lieutenant Elmer J. Kirtland (co-pilot), Captain Robert G. Huff (Squadron Adjutant), Staff Sergeants Lawrence E. Herbst (engineer) and David B. McCready (top turret gunner) and Tech Sergeant Fred E. Arnett (radio operator/waist gunner) — were quickly hauled aboard. Gordon re-started the engines and the Catalina laboured through the swells and bounced into the air.

But before he got very far, Gordon received another call from Major Coltharp of more men in the water west of Nago Island. These were Smith, Benson and Rushing, the three survivors of *Pissonit*. They had now been floating in the water a little over an hour. Together with his four P-47 escorts, Gordon returned to Kavieng. He located the three men quickly, again power-stalled to land, taxied up to the crew in the water, and cut his left engine so as not to hit them. Although the Catalina was taken under fire by the enemy shore positions, the crew hauled in the three men after which the pilots again made it back into the air. Now with 19 people aboard, including his own ten-man crew, Gordon again headed for home.

Gordon had got about 20 miles out when Major Coltharp called again. He had spotted yet another two life rafts with six men only 600 yards off North Cape. Would he go back and pick them up? Already overloaded with people and a large volume of water sloshing around in the bilges, Gordon knew this would be very risky. Also, two of his fighter escorts had to leave because of fuel shortage. Gordon asked Coltharp whether he would stay with him. When Coltharp said 'yes', Gordon without further hesitation turned around and flew back to Kavieng.

The men spotted in the rafts were Captain Cavoli and his crew from 41-30531. By now they had been floating for approximately an hour and a half. During their long wait they had been under intermittent fire from the shore. A small enemy boat from Kavieng tried to approach them. Realising this and in full view of the Japanese on the shore, Major Coltharp roared in strafing until the boat disintegrated under a hail of .50-calibre bullets with nothing remaining after the spray cleared. The Japanese made no further attempts to capture the downed flyers.

Finding the raft only a few hundred yards offshore, because of the direction of the wind and swells, Gordon was obliged to make his approach directly over the beach and through a hail of Japanese gun-fire. Skimming across the shore at just 300 feet, his men firing every available weapon down at the Japanese, Gordon brought the PBY in for a perfect landing, pulled up to the rafts and shut down the engines. The time was 1255. The six men were hauled aboard, the engines came to life again and, turning sharply right and left to void the shells' splashes, the badly leaking PBY began its take-off run. The Japanese threw everything they had at the plane to prevent its escape. The black hull ploughed through the swells, the engines straining to heave the water-logged aircraft from the water. Gradually, the airspeed increased and, after what seemed an eternity, they were airborne.

For the last time, the battered Catalina headed for home. Gordon put crewmen to work with buckets to get rid of some of the water in the bilges and thus lighten the load. Fifty miles south of Kavieng the remaining two fighters had to leave the PBY due to lack of fuel, leaving Gordon to complete his return flight past enemy-held territory without escort. Hours later, they touched down in Langemak Bay at Finschhafen and put 15 grateful airmen ashore. The wounded were immediately transferred to the hospital ship *San Pablo*. After refuelling, the Catalina returned to its home base at Samarai, a small island off the tip of the Papuan Peninsula. Total flying time on the mission had been 7.4 hours to Finschhafen and another 2.6 hours back to base. Coltharp and Chiappe, their B-25s low on fuel, barely made Cape Gloucester.

Admiral Halsey was greatly impressed with the performance of Gordon and his men, so much so that he took time to dash off a message of congratulations: 'Please pass my admiration on to that saga-writing Kavieng Cat crew. Halsey.' Nathan Gordon was later rewarded with the Medal of Honor for his day's work and every one of his crew received a Silver Star.

The daring exploit generated an immediate spate of publicity for the Catalina crew. Here Australian war correspondent G. Hawksley, left, interviews Gordon and his three ensigns for *Truth War* magazine on February 17, two days after the operation. Gordon is in the centre with Ensign John A. Kelly (first pilot) on the right. Seated in the blister above are Ensigns Leu R. Fulmer, Jr, (third pilot) and Walter L. Patrick (second pilot). Picture by Australian army photographer Frank Bagnall. (AWM)

The February 15 strike on Kavieng harbour had resulted in the loss of ten Allied aircraft and the deaths of 25 crewmembers. Another five aircraft had been so seriously damaged that they had had to make emergency landings at Finschhafen. However, the attack had ruined the remaining Japanese aerodrome, silenced three anti-aircraft batteries, wrecked the aircraft and engine-repair facilities, destroyed ten patrol floatplanes in the harbour, blown up an ammo dump in a massive explosion, and set fires that blazed into the night.

Following the attack of the 15th there was a sudden flurry of Japanese shipping activity, with convoys being sighted pulling out of Rabaul and Kavieng. The B-25s were back to hit the ships on the 16th and 17th and again on the 19th, assisted on the latter day by A-20s of the 3rd Group. The Liberators joined in the anti-shipping strikes on the 20th, claiming two ships sunk. The final attack came on February 21, when the 345th and 38th Groups sent out their Mitchells. Weather turned back all aircraft except those of the 500th and 501st Squadrons. Their 16 aircraft found a convoy of five cargo ships and sank two. These were the last large ships to clear Rabaul. Between February 13 and 21, the Japanese had lost 13 ships totalling 16,465 tons.

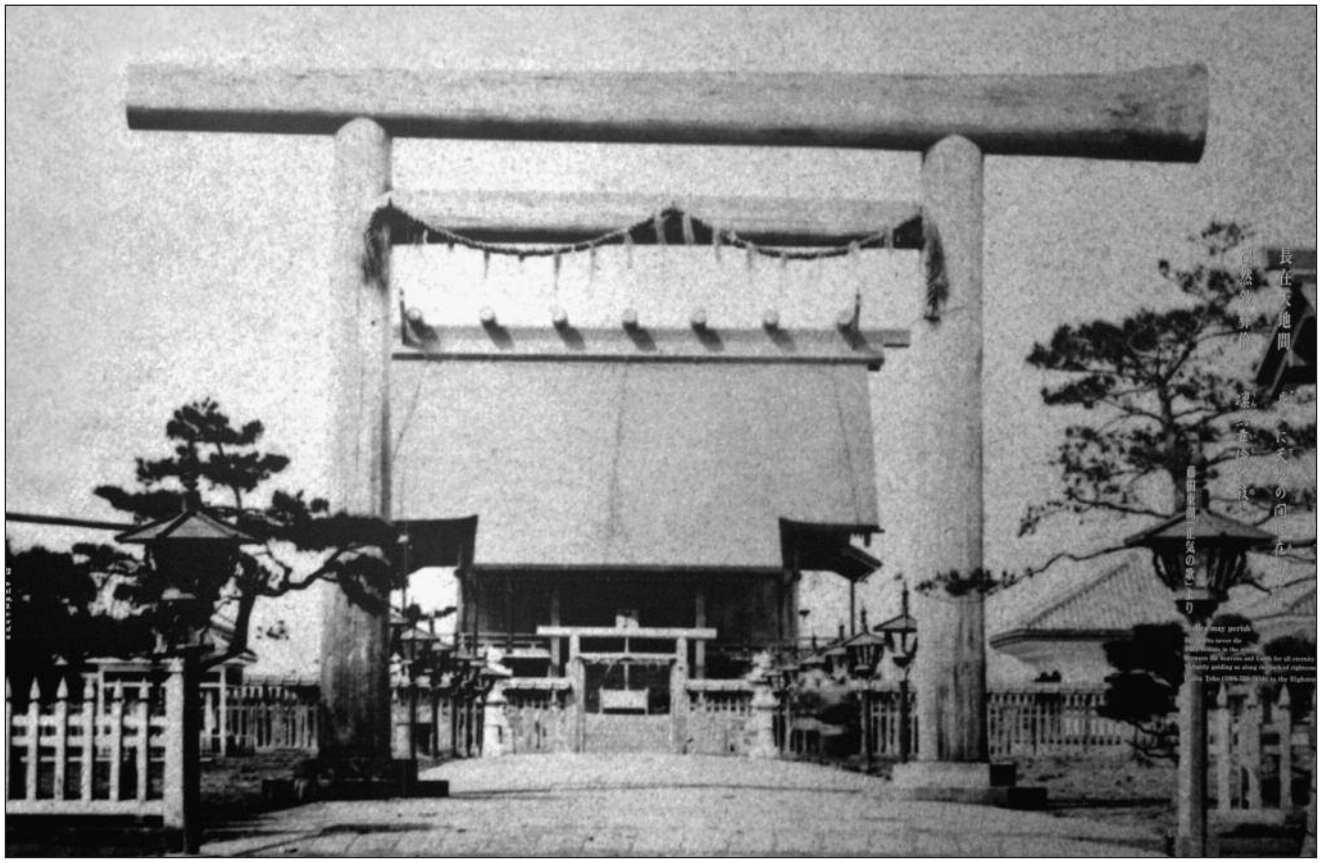
On March 12, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that Kavieng, like Rabaul, would be isolated rather than occupied. Eight days later, on March 20, Halsey went into Emirau. As part of that operation, a diversionary strike was conducted against Kavieng by Task Force 37 made up of the old Pacific Fleet battleships *New Mexico*, *Mississippi*, *Tennessee* and *Idaho* and eight destroyers of Squadron 25. Operating with the bombardment group was Task Group 36.6 comprising aircraft carriers *Manila Bay* and *Natoma Bay* and a screen of six destroyers. After the carrier aircraft had bombarded Kavieng township and the two airfields, the fleet levelled what remained of these targets and the coastal defence batteries with 1,079 rounds of 14-inch and 12,281 rounds of 5-inch shells.

The bombardment demoralised the Japanese garrison and kept them under the desired impression that a landing on New Ireland was imminent. However with the establishment of the Allied base at Emirau, they were now effectively cut off from support and allowed to whither on the vine.

Kavieng was not occupied by Australian troops until after the Japanese capitulation in August 1945.

Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, commander of the US Seventh Fleet, presented Gordon the Medal of Honor on July 13, 1944 in ceremonies at Brisbane, Australia. At the same ceremony every one of Gordon's crew received a Silver Star. This group photo was taken afterwards. Front row (L-R): 1st Lieutenant Nathan G. Gordon, commander; Ensign John A. Kelly, first pilot; Ensign Walter L. Patrick, second pilot, and Ensign Leu R. Fulmer, Jr, third pilot. Back row: AMM1c Wiley R. Routon, Jr, plane captain and first mechanic; ARM1c Aleck G. Alexander, first radioman; AMM2c Joseph P. Germeau, second mechanic; AMM3c John Brately, third mechanic; ARM3c Robert Murch, second radioman, and AOM2c Paul J. Wodnick, ordnance man. (J. Brately)

On February 16, one day after the big Kavieng raid, 41 strafers from the 345th Bomb Group joined three squadrons from the 38th to search for a 14-ship Japanese convoy headed for Kavieng. Here, *Brother Rat* of the 500th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lieutenant Richard B. Fritzshall, attacks a 420-ton Japanese submarine chaser off the tip of New Hanover Island. The picture was taken from *Rita's Wagon* of the same squadron, piloted by Captain Max Mortensen. (USNA)



YASUKUNI JINJA

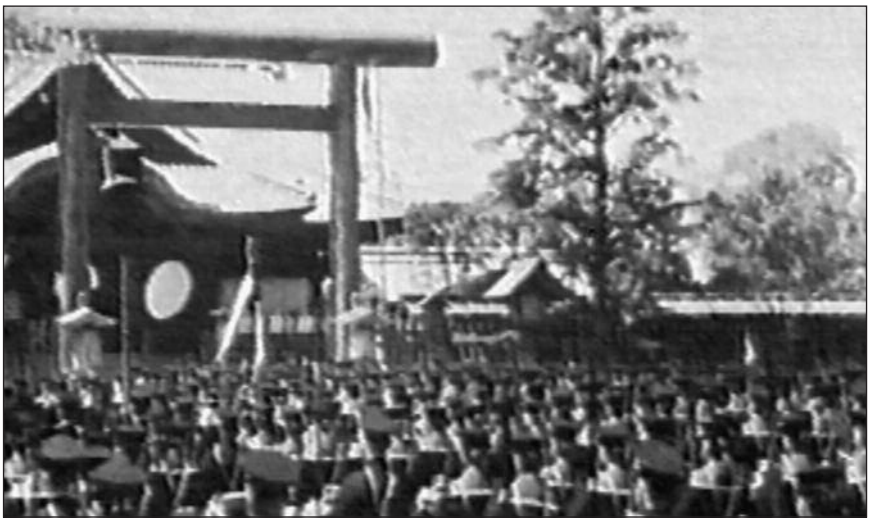
By David Mitchelhill-Green

Of the few remaining vestiges of wartime Japan, one of the most controversial is Yasukuni Jinja (shrine). A legacy of Japan's pre-war union of religion and state, Yasukuni was built at a time when the Emperor was a divine sovereign and the military's dead were venerated as deities. Although originally erected to honour imperial soldiers who died fighting the Tokugawa Shogunate (regime), Japanese soldiers killed in subsequent wars were also enshrined there. For the pre-1945 Japanese military, Yasukuni was a powerful instrument used to promote nationalism and the supreme sacrifice — the ramifications of which are still being felt today.

Sixty years after the cessation of hostilities, Yasukuni continues to ignite heated debate over Japan's role in the Second World War. International protests began in 1978 when 1,068 convicted war criminals, including 14 Class A criminals — one of whom was the Japanese wartime prime minister Hideki Tojo, hanged in 1948 (see *After the Battle* No. 81) — were secretly enshrined at Yasukuni. Despite strong condemnation from its Asian neighbours, the Japanese have unrepentantly expressed a different position. In the words of the shrine's English language website, these 1,068 men — the so-called 'Martyrs of Showa' — were 'cruelly' tried after the war as war criminals in a 'sham-like tribunal of the Allied forces'. Such a critical stance against the actions of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (also known as the Tokyo Trial) of 1946 to 1948, as well as the other 'Minor' trials, is expressed in the country's foremost English language encyclopedia, which challenges that charges brought by the Allies against the accused in the Pacific War amount to little more than 'revenge dressed up in the trappings of legality'.

However, for us to appreciate the attitude of the Japanese combatant during the Second World War, his readiness to kill and die for the emperor, and the significance of Yasukuni Jinja, is to first understand the origins and foundation of modern Japan.

After eight centuries of warrior rule, a coup d'état by imperial forces in January 1868 overthrew the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate; a period known as the Meiji Restoration. As a unified state under imperial rule, the newly installed government was quick to abolish the previous feudal system and introduce a more egalitarian one. Under the motto fukoku kyohei (a rich country and a strong military) an ambitious reform programme was undertaken which led to the adoption of European arms and production techniques, clothing, architecture, and economic models. In 1869 the Japanese Imperial Army was formed from nationally conscripted men of all classes (previously only samurai could carry weapons) and modeled on the Prussian military system, while; the Imperial Navy was based on the British Royal Navy.



Soldiers assembled at Yasukuni before leaving Japan for the war — a still from a Japanese wartime newsreel. The shrine is located in central Tokyo near the Imperial Palace. Here the dead from several wars are commemorated, this particular ceremony being held during what the Japanese call the Greater East Asian War.

Although undated, this particular visit by Emperor Hirohito and his wife must have taken place early in the war as the voice-over to the film says that they are praying for the souls of 19,987 war dead. Outside, 40,000 relatives watch the ceremony.

Religion was also restructured and closely controlled under the new administration. Buddhist rituals introduced from China and traditionally practiced for the dead were deemed a negative foreign influence and banned. Instead, Shinto (meaning 'the way of kami') was adopted as the official religion. Shinto is a belief in a divine force that resides in nature, such as mountains, wind and rain, animals, and certain human beings. Central to its practice is the worshipping, usually at a shrine, of the souls of the dead — the kami — who have become a god or deity. The Meiji government also introduced the emperor myth, namely that the Japanese emperor was a 'sacred and inviolable' individual from an unbroken imperial line descended originally from the sun god.

Shinto, with its indigenous roots and a living god as monarch, provided an ideological framework that bonded common folk and samurai through these times of massive cultural, social, and technological change. Since Kokka (or State) Shinto was made one of the three official branches of the religion, the Ministry of the Army was given authority over a new Shinto shrine built to commemorate loyalist soldiers killed during the restoration of imperial rule. Established in 1869 near the Imperial Palace in Tokyo (the new capital), this symbol of the newly unified Japan was known as Tokyo Shokonsha (Shrine for Inviting Spirits). Later in 1879, when the seat of government was transferred from Kyoto to Tokyo, Emperor Meiji renamed it Yasukuni Jinja — ironically 'Shrine for Establishing Peace in the Empire'.

Japan, however, was soon embroiled in a series of wars and those soldiers killed in battle were enshrined at Yasukuni as kami — the highest honour that could be bestowed upon an individual after death and the sole way in which the emperor would worship the soul of a commoner.

In 1926, Emperor Hirohito (posthumously referred to as Showa — meaning, paradoxically, 'Enlightened Peace') ascended the throne as the 124th 'Tenno' (Heavenly Sovereign) in the world's oldest monarchy. As Japanese histories point out, throughout his reign Hirohito was cautious in intervening and criticising in the affairs of his government, acting directly on only two occasions: suppressing Chinese rebel forces in 1936, and later accepting unconditional surrender to the Allies in 1945. While historians actively debate his role in the war, it was with his approval that Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, subsequently congratulating his troops for their victories. While he questioned his own divinity, Hirohito understood that, as the sacred leader of Japan, his troops were dying in combat out of reverence for him. To honour them, he visited Yasukuni Jinja on 20 occasions before the end of the war, including eight times after August 1945, compared with his grandfather, Emperor Meiji, who visited the shrine only seven times and his father, Emperor Tasiho, who visited twice.

Prior to, and throughout the war, Yasukuni was the second most important Shinto shrine in Japan, the first being the great shrine at Ise. Moreover, Yasukuni was *the* focal point of Japan's militarism and nationalism; Shinto and Yasukuni being fundamental to the war effort. It was a site so sacred that even passing tramcars halted outside so that passengers could stand and bow. The meaning and importance of the shrine was reflected in popular contemporary songs about death and later reunion. One promised: 'You and I are cherry blossoms of the same year. Even if we're far apart when our petals fall, we'll bloom again in the treetops of the capital's Yasukuni Jinja'. Another song celebrated: 'Your mother weeps with joy; It's too great an honour for us; That you are worshipped as a god at the Yasukuni Jinja'. Similarly, the prospect of veneration at Yasukuni consoled Kamikaze pilots who promised their comrades, 'I will be waiting for you at Yasukuni Shrine', before embarking upon a suicide mission.

During the 20th century the Imperial Army adopted the samurai sword — an anachronistic weapon of the feudal era, but one with unique spiritual significance. In 1933 the War Ministry founded a group of smiths (Tosho) to produce swords within the grounds of Yasukuni Jinja. Known as Yasukuni-to, these swords preserved ancient forging techniques and revived the samurai spirit. Far superior to the mass-produced machine-made swords of the era, referred to as Showa-to, in total 8,100 swords were traditionally made at Yasukuni from 1933 until 1945.

Today, Yasukuni's *Book of Souls* honours nearly 2,466,495 war dead including those from the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), the First World War, and the Manchurian Incident (1931). The vast majority, some 93 per cent or 2.3 million of those enshrined, were killed during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) and the Greater East Asian War (1941-45) — what the Japanese call the Pacific phase of World War II. However it is not only fallen soldiers who are venerated at Yasukuni. Also enshrined are 57,000 women and children, including 1,600 male school students who fought alongside the army in Okinawa; 460 female students who served as nurses; 700 elementary school students who died in the sinking of the transport *Tsushima Maru,* and student workers killed in air raids on factories.

Hirohito descends the stairs at Yasukuni after praying for the kami — the souls of the war dead venerated as gods.

Although the shrine survived the ravages of the American bombing campaign, General Douglas MacArthur, the Allied commander during the occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1951, purportedly considered burning it down until a Jesuit priest persuaded him otherwise. In accordance with the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, 1945, during the Allied occupation of Japan control of Yasukuni was transferred away from the military and passed onto to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Under the Allied agreement all obstacles in the path of democracy were to be removed, one of the measures taken being the separation of Shinto from the state. The myth that the emperor was living god was shattered on New Year's Day 1946 after a startling public broadcast by Hirohito, who broke imperial silence and renounced his divinity. Under the 1947 constitution he was divested of political powers and demoted to an agency of the prime minister's office.

Despite the post-war ruling that Yasukuni must remain independent of the government as a private religious establishment, the issue of whether or not governmental support should return remains a contentious one. Even though Article 20, Paragraph 3 of the Japanese post-war constitution prohibits the government from engaging in any religious activity, after the American occupation ended in 1952 right-wing and political pressure groups such as the Nihon Izokukai (Bereaved Families Association) have pushed to restore government sponsorship of the shrine.

Domestic debate has arisen over whether government officials have the right to visit the shrine in an official capacity. While Article 89 of the constitution prohibits official state visits to Yasukuni, on August 15, 1985 — the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War — Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone visited the shrine in an official capacity. Assured by his advisors beforehand that his visit was constitutional, the Japanese media now speculates each year if, and when, the incumbent prime minister will visit Yasukuni — a much publicised, divisive event in Japan that draws protest from veterans groups and governments around the world.

Although the official surrender document was enacted before General MacArthur on the battleship *Missouri* on September 2, 1945 (see *After the Battle* No. 50), outlying Japanese garrisons continued to surrender piecemeal for several months thereafter. MacArthur governed Japan for six years but for some reason there are very few photos taken of him during that period. Here he is pictured with Emperor Hirohito at the US embassy on September 27. Three months later the emperor's position as a deity was removed, so ending Japan's history of divine rule.

Although Hirohito's son, Emperor Akihito, has never visited the shrine, a small minority of Japanese believe the very existence of the imperial family may one day lead to a resurgence in nationalism even though the majority of the population favours the status quo.

Whereas such bellicose behaviour is illegal in Germany, in Japan it is not uncommon to hear right-wing groups blaring nationalistic messages and broadcasting wartime propaganda songs. In 1997 Hiro Onoda — the former 2nd lieutenant who became a celebrity figure in Japan when he finally emerged from the jungle on the Philippine island of Lubang in 1974 still believing the war was being fought — likewise denounced the failure by government leaders to officially visit Yasukuni. According to Onoda: 'At the time of the war, we were all dedicating our lives to the state of Japan, believing we would all be enshrined and honoured at Yasukuni Shrine as gods after our death. But now Japan has thrown away its pride as a nation, as it has given up on the official visits by the nation's leader'.

With the occupation of Japan, the Yasukuni Shrine was divorced from the military and transferred to the civil Tokyo administration.

Revering the spirits of the dead at the shrine. Yasukuni remains a controversial issue today, all the more so since 14 Japanese Class A war criminals were secretly enshrined there in 1978 as 'Martyrs of Showa'.

Since then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, has honoured his 2001 election promise and, to date, made four pilgrimages to the shrine. In regard to the veneration of war criminals, Koizumi has declared that 'the deceased should all be venerated. These Class A war criminals have already received the death penalty . . . do we need to be so selective?' In early August 2001 a group including Onoda and the former Japanese ambassador to Thailand sponsored a two-page advertisement in a prominent newspaper publicly praising (they were 'delighted') Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's forthcoming visit to Yasukuni on August 15.

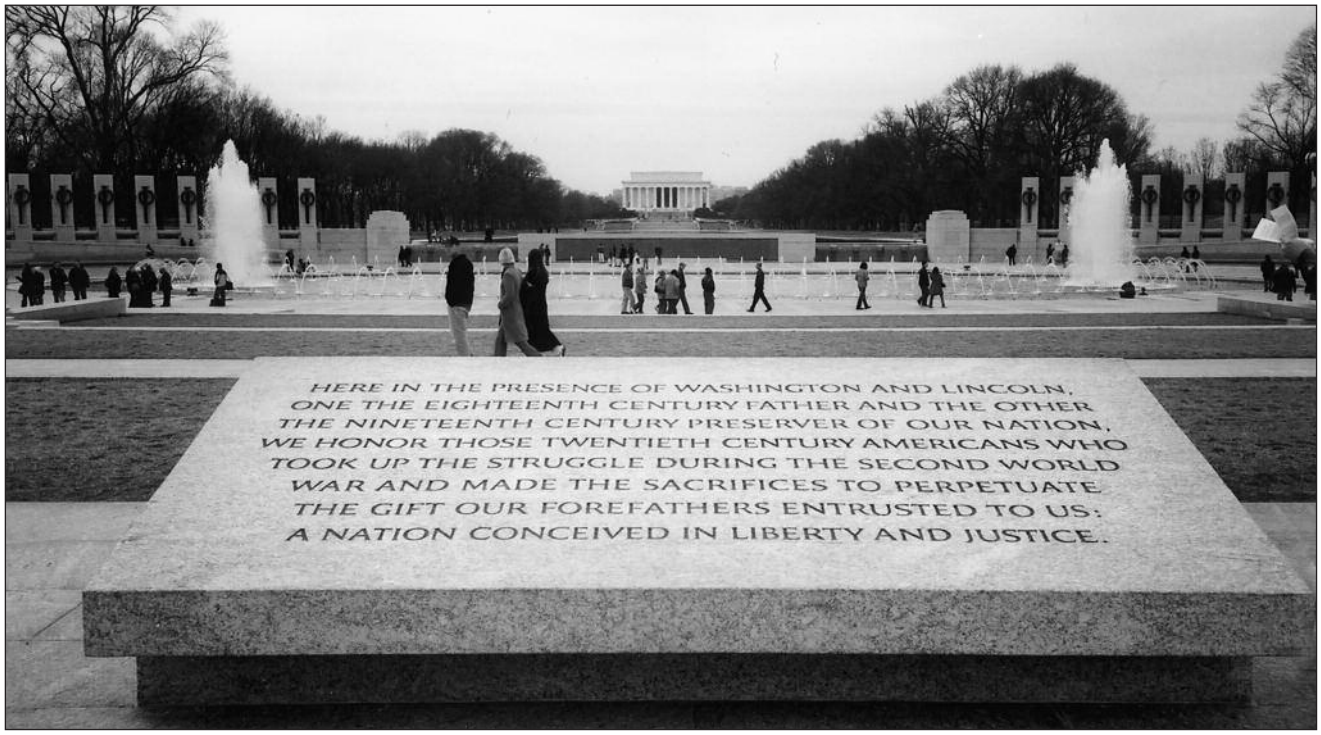
As long as such official visits continue without diplomatic reconciliation, a strong rift will remain open between Japan and those nations whose citizens suffered under its militaristic yoke — what China has called 'righteous indignation'. For the eight million Japanese visitors to Yasukuni each year, however, it remains the national memorial to honour their war dead.

THE YUSHUKAN

Next to Yasukuni Jinja is the Yushukan, literally Yushu hall, and meaning 'to study under and commune with a noble-minded soul'. This war museum was erected in 1882 to display artefacts from fallen soldiers and rebuilt in 1931 following the Great Earthquake of 1923. Recent renovations, coinciding with the 130th anniversary of Yasukuni, now display each artefact indoors. The Yushukan's exhibits chronologically recount the story of modern Japan, the European colonial repression of neighbouring countries, and the path leading to the Second World War.

Visitors entering the extensive collection, the only public war museum in Japan, first view a restored Zero fighter and the first steam locomotive to travel along the Thai-Burma railroad before entering a series of galleries. Each one contains the belongings of fallen soldiers, such as those in Room 6 which includes articles belonging to the kami who sacrificed themselves during the commencement of the Greater East Asian War — the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In all, the Yashukan provides a fascinating insight into the Japanese mentality, the origin of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy, and the conflicts in which they fought.


HERE IN THE PRESENCE OF WASHINGTON AND LINCOLN,
ONE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FATHER AND THE OTHER
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY PRESERVER OF OUR NATION,
WE HONOR THOSE TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICANS WHO
TOOK UP THE STRUGGLE DURING THE SECOND WORLD
WAR AND MADE THE SACRIFICES TO PERPETUATE
THE GIFT OUR FOREFATHERS ENTRUSTED TO US:
A NATION CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY AND JUSTICE.

In May 2004, the United States inaugurated a National World War II Memorial on the Mall in Washington to honour all those that served, fought and died during the Second World War. Realisation of the project took 17 years and was the result of a painful process wrought with controversy, both over the site selected and the final design of the memorial.

THE US NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

By Karel Margry

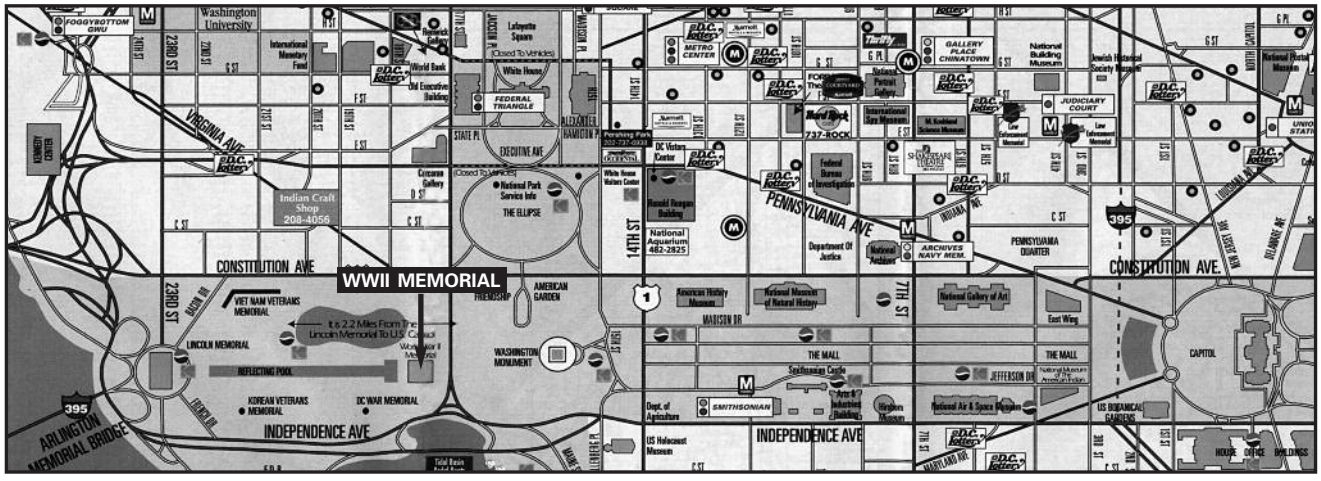
On May 29, 2004, nearly six decades after the end of the Second World War, the United States dedicated a new memorial to what many Americans regard as the defining event of the 20th century: the National World War II Memorial. Located on the National Mall in Washington, DC — the prime spot in the nation's capital — the memorial honours the 16 million Americans who served in the armed forces of the US, the more than 400,000 who died, and all those who supported the war effort from home. It is the nation's tribute to the generation that helped win the war.

The dedication of the memorial was the culmination of a 17-year effort that started in the mid-1980s, gathered speed after the memorial was authorised by Congress in 1993 and reached fruition after several years of fund-raising, discussion and public hearings.

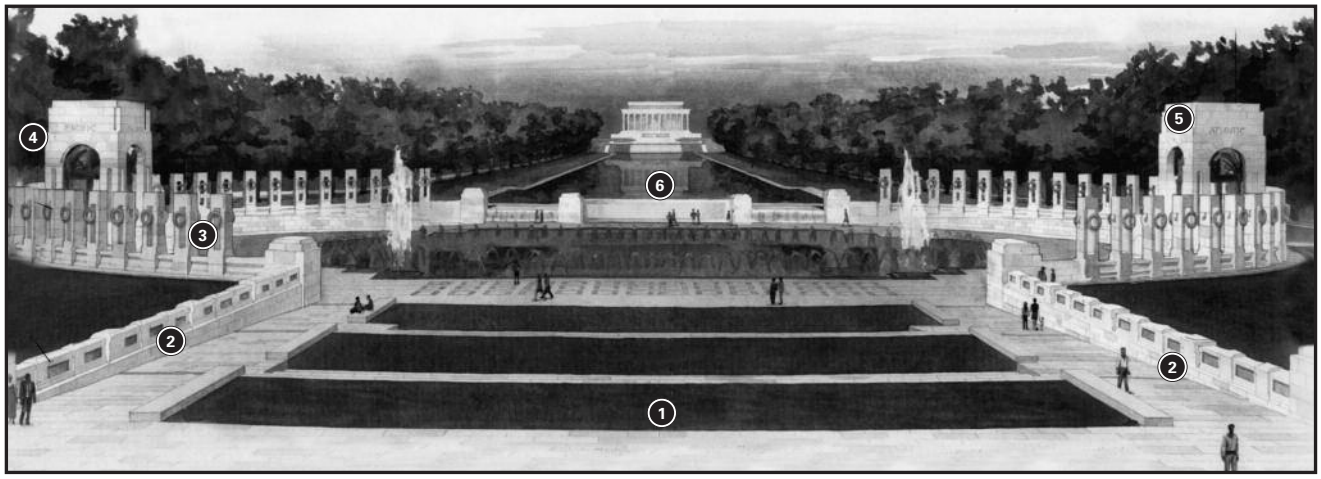
The story of the memorial began on December 10, 1987, when Marcy Kaptur, Democrat Representative for Ohio, at the suggestion of WWII veteran Roger Dubin, introduced legislation to establish a National World War II Memorial in Washington or its environs.

The initiative was prompted by a genuine sentiment that America's World War II generation had not received the national recognition it was due. While there already existed national memorials to commemorate individual branches of the armed services (such as the Iwo Jima Memorial at Arlington dedicated to the Marine Corps — see *After the Battle* No. 82) or specific military formations and units, there was until then no single memorial commemorating the combined efforts of all Americans and honouring all those who gave their lives during the war. Many Americans felt such a memorial long overdue, the more so since there already existed national memorials on the Mall to honour the soldiers of the Korean and Vietnam Wars. As time went on, the lack of such an all-encompassing national memorial for WWII was increasingly felt.

After several years of discussion, with additional legislation being introduced in 1989, 1991 and 1993, Congress passed authorisation for the establishment of a World War II Memorial in the prime area of the national capital, known as Area I, which includes the National Mall. On May 25, 1993, President Bill Clinton signed Public Law 103-32, giving the responsibility for raising funds, designing, and then constructing the memorial to the American Battle Monuments Commission.



The memorial is on 17th Street at the site of the former Rainbow Pool, between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.



Artist's impression of the memorial designed by architect Friedrich St. Florian, as seen from 17th Street. [1] Entrance Steps. [2] Bas-relief Sculptures. [3] Pillars representing US States, Territories and District of Columbia. [4] Pacific Pavilion. [5] Atlantic Pavilion. [6] Freedom Wall. In the background is the Reflecting Pool stretching out to the Lincoln Memorial.

The first step in establishing the memorial was the selection of an appropriate site. On January 20, 1995, the Battle Monuments Commission and a 12-member Memorial Advisory Board (appointed by President Clinton the previous September) held their first joint site-selection session attended by representatives of the other agencies involved: the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Capital Memorial Commission, the National Park Service, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Seven potential sites were visited: the Capitol Reflecting Pool area (between 3rd Street and the Reflecting Pool); the Tidal Basin (north-east side, east of the Tidal Basin parking lot and west of the 14th Street Bridge access road); the West Potomac Park (between Ohio Drive and the northern shore of the Potomac river, north-west of the FDR Memorial); the Constitution Gardens (east end, between Constitution Avenue and the Rainbow Pool); the Washington Monument grounds (at Constitution Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets, west of the Museum of American History); Freedom Plaza (on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets); and Henderson Hall, adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery (this site was dropped from consideration because of its unavailability).

Six weeks later, on March 2, the Battle Monuments Commission and the Advisory Board unanimously selected the Constitution Gardens as the most appropriate site. However, the final choice depended on approval by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Memorial Commission. On July 27 the CFA concluded after a public hearing that the selected site would not be commensurate with the historical significance of World War II, and requested that further consideration be given to the Capitol Reflecting Pool and the Freedom Plaza along with two new alternatives, the traffic circle on Columbia Island (on the Lincoln Memorial — Arlington Cemetery axis); and the Rainbow Pool (at the east end of the Reflecting Pool between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument).

On August 6 the Battle Monuments Commission proposed that that one of the new alternatives, the Rainbow Pool site, be studied as a replacement for the Constitution Gardens. The Commission of Fine Arts approved this site on September 19 and so did the National Capital Memorial Commission on October 5 (on the condition that the Mall's east-west vista formed by the elm trees bordering the Reflecting Pool would be preserved).

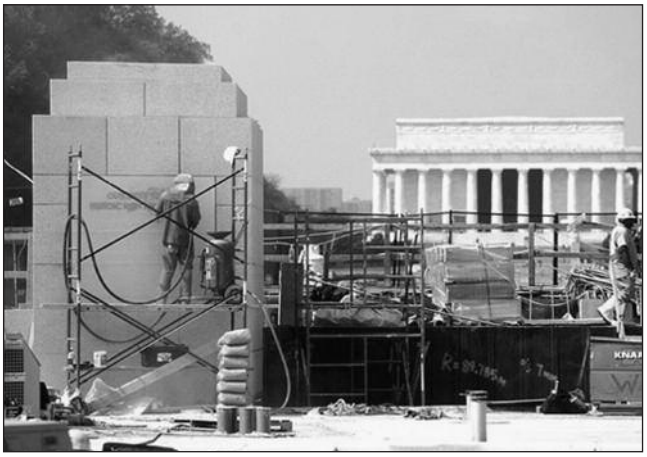
On Veterans Day (November 11) 1995, President Clinton dedicated the Rainbow Pool site in a formal ceremony that concluded the 50th Anniversary of World War II commemorations. The main elements of the ceremony were the burial of 'Sacred Soil' from 16 WWII cemeteries at the spot and the unveiling of a plaque marking the site as the future location of the World War II Memorial.

Once the place had been decided on, the next step was to decide on the design of the memorial. In April 1996, the General Services Administration's (GSA) Public Buildings Service, acting as agent for the Battle Monuments Commission, announced an open, two-stage, national design competition for the memorial. By the time the competition closed in August, no less than 404 designs had been submitted. A 12-member Evaluation Board (chaired by architect Hugh Hardy, and including four World War II veterans) reviewed all entries, looking at their originality, appropriateness, feasibility, and compliance with project requirements, and selected six finalists for the competition's second stage.

After this closed on October 25, a ten-member independent Design Jury — composed of architects, landscape architects, architectural critics and three more WWII veterans and chaired by architect David M. Childs — reviewed the six designs. The Evaluation Board did the same and also interviewed the six design teams.

Both the Jury and the Board, independently of each other, recommended unanimously that the team of Leo A. Daly architecture and engineering firm, with Friedrich St. Florian as design architect, be selected. The winning design consisted of a paved plaza, lowered 15-feet below grade, enclosed at the north and south by semi-circular structures consisting of 25 40-foot-high columns and 50-foot-high walls and sloping earthen berms, inside of which would be housed a large educational and exhibition space.

A teacher at the Rhode Island School of Design and the author of several acclaimed theoretical works on architecture, St. Florian's previous works included the Plaza Mall in his home state's capital Providence



The memorial took almost two years to build, these pictures showing construction underway in 2003. *Left:* **The central plaza taking shape, with the pillars on the north side already in place.** *Right:* **Sandblasting an inscription. (R. Latoff)**

Senator Bob Dole, chairman of the National World War II Memorial Campaign, addresses the audience at the official dedication on Memorial Day 2004. (D. Ripper)

President George W. Bush delivering his inaugural speech. (D. Ripper)

and the Oslo Opera House in Norway. In addition to St. Florian the Leo A. Daly team included George E. Hartman of Hartman-Cox Architects, landscape architect James A. van Sweden of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, sculptor Raymond J. Kaskey, and stone carver and letterer Nicholas Benson. The Battle Monuments Commission approved the recommendation on November 20 and on January 17, 1997, President Clinton announced St. Florian's winning design during a White House ceremony.

However, the design still needed to be approved by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission. In July, the former approved many elements of the design concept, but voiced strong concern over the mass and scale and the interior space of the envisaged memorial and requested that the design be given further study and re-submitted at a later date. The NCPC likewise requested modifications and an analysis of various environmental considerations.

In his revised design concept, St. Florian dropped plans for a museum — an element required in the original design competition — replacing it with other elements, the main ones being the retention of the Rainbow Pool in the centre of the plaza and the addition of two pavilions and a wall of commemoration. The revised concept was approved by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission in the summer of 1998. The two commissions approved the preliminary design in 1999; the final architectural design in 2000; and several ancillary elements — such as an information pavilion, a comfort station, and a contemplative area — in November-December of that year. And so, on Veterans Day (November 11) 2000, a groundbreaking ceremony attended by 15,000 people was held at the Rainbow Pool site.

Meanwhile, in March 1997, a National World War II Memorial Campaign had been set up to raise money for and increase public awareness of the memorial. Appointed to lead the campaign as Chairman was Senator Bob Dole, longest-serving Republican Leader in the US Senate and himself a disabled veteran from the Italian battlefield decorated with the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, with Frederick W. Smith, founder of the Federal Express Corporation and a former US Marine Corps officer, as Co-Chairman. Actor Tom Hanks — an avid supporter of the WWII veterans community since his memorable performance in Steven Spielberg's movie *Saving Private Ryan* (see *After the Battle* No. 104) and involvement in the subsequent TV series *Band of Brothers* — became the campaign's National Spokesman.

Over a period of four years, the fund-raising campaign collected more than $195 million in cash and pledges, enough to cover the total project costs of approximately $180 million. Most of the money came from private contributions, either direct from individual citizens or through private organisations. Hundreds of business corporations and foundations, veterans associations and civic, fraternal and professional organisations put in donations, some of them very large. During the 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 terms, the Memorial Campaign conducted a special fund-raising drive aimed at schools. Some 1,200 of them across the country joined the cause and mounted local fund-raisers. Individual states and cities donated substantial sums. The federal government provided $16 million.

The Memorial Campaign also published a quarterly newsletter that included stories about World War II and its participants, both in battle and on the home front, and kept members up to date on the memorial's progress.

In January 2001, the US National Park Service issued a building permit for the memorial. However, just before the builders were to start construction, the project met an unexpected hitch. From the moment the Rainbow Pool had come up as a possible site in 1995, there had been growing criticism over the memorial. The critics had nothing against a World War II Memorial as such, and were actually in favour of it, but they strongly opposed its location, arguing that placing the memorial at the Rainbow Pool would destroy the open vista and unbroken sweep between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. The selection of the St. Florian design in 1996 released a further storm of controversy, architects and other critics attacking it as too grandiose and too bland. Some even said it evoked memories of the architecture of the Third Reich. The memorial's most vocal enemy was the National Coalition to Save our Mall, led by architectural historian Judith Feldman. In February 2001 this group filed a lawsuit demanding a stop to the construction of the memorial. Start of the work was delayed indefinitely pending resolution of the lawsuit.

Some 150,000 people attended the opening ceremony, including many thousands of veterans. (D. Ripper)

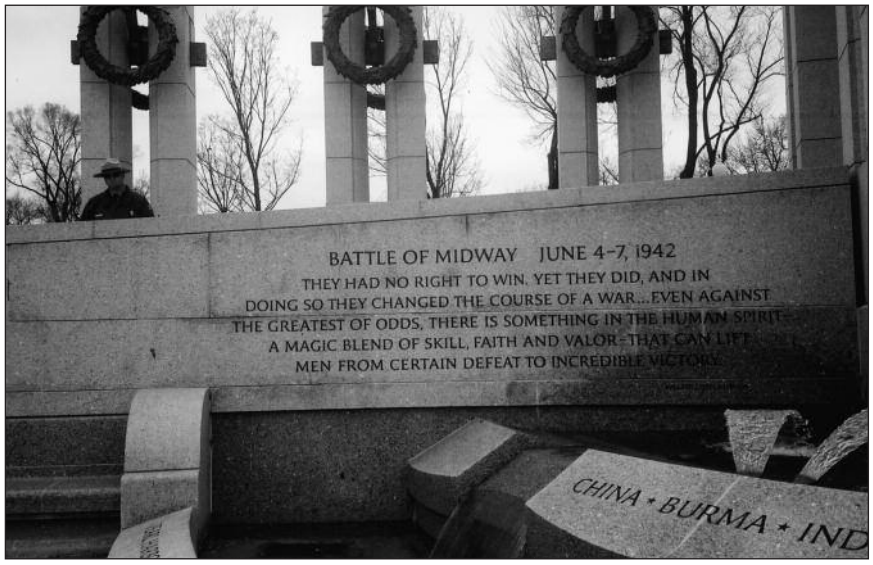
The central plaza with the reconstructed Rainbow Pool on the right and the Pacific Pavilion beyond. Both before and after the opening of the memorial, St. Florian's design has met with severe criticism, reviewers comparing it unfavourably with other relatively recent additions to the Mall such as Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial or James Ingo Freed's United States Holocaust Museum. *Time* magazine wrote: 'The men and women who fought in WW II deserve a monument commensurate with what they endured and accomplished. What have they actually got? Purest banality, an inert plaza dressed with off-the-shelf symbols of grief and glory. This is more than a missed opportunity. It's one more misfortune of the war . . . St. Florian's modernised neo-classicism — his wind-sheared surfaces and axial symmetry — instantly brings to mind Fascist architecture of the 1930s and '40s. It's true that in those same years neo-classicism was also the chosen style for government buildings all over Washington. But St. Florian's clean-lined take-on neoclassicism more closely resembles the Art-Deco-flavoured Moderne favoured by Mussolini.'

However, in May Congress stepped in, passing a law that shielded the project from judicial review and directing that the memorial be constructed expeditiously at the selected and already dedicated site. President George W. Bush signed the legislation into law on Memorial Day, May 28. Faced with this legislation, US District Judge Henry H. Kennedy dismissed the opponents' lawsuit in August. The National Coalition to Save our Mall appealed to a federal court but this rejected their appeal in November. With all obstacles removed, construction could go ahead.

The general contractor for the memorial was a joint venture of Tompkins Builders and Grunley-Walsh Construction, two firms that collectively had 135 years of experience on federal projects in and around Washington, having been engaged in building or renovating such landmarks as the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, the FDR Memorial, the White House, and the US Capitol Building. On June 7, 2001, the General Services Administration awarded Tompkins/Grunley-Walsh a $56 million contract for construction of the memorial.

Other contractors included New England Stone Industries, who fabricated the granite pillars and vertical walls at its plants in Smithfield and Quonset Point, Rhode Island; Rock of Ages at Barre, Vermont, who constructed the two pavilions; the North Carolina Granite Corporation who fabricated the plaza and pool stone at Mount Airy, North Carolina; and Laran Bronze, Inc. of Chester, Pennsylvania, and Stewart Springs/Valley Bronze of Joseph, Oregon, who did the bronze casting of Ray Kaskey's sculptures.

Above: **Adorning the pavilion floors is a representation of the Victory Medal, received by all those who served in WW II.** *Right:* **Granite pillars represent the 56 states and territories of the period and the District of Columbia.**


BATTLE OF MIDWAY JUNE 4-7, 1942
THEY HAD NO RIGHT TO WIN. YET THEY DID, AND IN
DOING SO THEY CHANGED THE COURSE OF A WAR...EVEN AGAINST
THE GREATEST OF ODDS, THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT
A MAGIC BLEND OF SKILL, FAITH AND VALOR - THAT CAN LIFT
MEN FROM CERTAIN DEFEAT TO INCREDIBLE VICTORY
CHINA • BURMA • IND

Landmark events of the war like Pearl Harbor, Midway, D-Day, the war's end, are illustrated by famous quotations inscribed on the walls. This laudation of the Battle of Midway on the wall below the Pacific Pavilion is by historian Walter Lord.

On Aug 27, 2001, Tompkins/Grunley-Walsh began preparatory work at the memorial site. Construction began one week later. While building was underway, important decisions had yet to be taken. Each element of the memorial — be it the types of stone used, the memorial announcement stone on 17th Street, the entrance flagpoles, bas-relief panels and other sculptures, inscriptions, or artistic enhancements — had to be approved by both the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission. This occurred in a series of public hearings held between June 2001 and April 2003.

After two and a half years of work, the memorial was finally completed and on April 29, 2004, it was opened to the public.

One month later, on May 29, the memorial was officially dedicated. The dedication celebration spanned four days (May 27-30) running over Memorial Day weekend 2004 and attracted an estimated 315,000 people. As part of the celebration a national World War II reunion exhibition was organised on the National Mall. Held in a large open-air tented area, it included a WWII-theme exhibition produced by the Smithsonian Institution and a large central area where all members of the WWII generation could gather and reunite under the accompaniment of big band and swing music. Other events included afternoon and evening entertainment salutes to the WWII veterans by armed forces musical groups and performers at the indoor MCI Center in downtown Washington, and a service of celebration and thanksgiving at the Washington National Cathedral on Saturday morning.

The dedication of the memorial took place on Saturday afternoon in a ceremony that drew 150,000 people. Two hours of lively pre-ceremony entertainment took attendees back to the wartime era through music, video images, newsreel clips and reminiscences of the time. Postmaster General John E. Potter and John F. Walsh of the US Postal Service unveiled a new postage stamp depicting the World War II Memorial. Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur spoke, introducing a video that chronicled the creation of the memorial.

The formal dedication ceremony began at 2 p.m.. After a presentation of state flags there followed an invocation by Archbishop Philip M. Hannan (a chaplain in World War II) and speeches by the chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission, retired Marine Corps General P. X. Kelley; by news anchorman Tom Brakow; and by Tom Hanks, Senator Bob Dole and Frederick Smith on behalf of the Memorial Campaign.

Following the speeches, a Marine bugler sounded Taps inside the memorial. General Kelley then presented the World War II Memorial to President George W. Bush who received it on behalf of the American people. In his speech President Bush lauded the memorial as 'a fitting tribute, open and expansive, like America; grand and enduring, like the achievements we honour.' The ceremony concluded with Denyce Graves leading *The National Anthem* and *God Bless America*. Dr. Barry C. Black, US Senate chaplain, offered the closing benediction.

The memorial covers 7.4 acres and is entered on 17th Street, between Constitution and Independence Avenues. Framing this entrance are two huge flagpoles, their bases adorned with the seals of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Army Air Forces, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. From there, wide steps and ramps lead down to the memorial's sunken central plaza.

Set into the walls on either side of the ramps is a series of 24 bronze bas-relief panels by sculptor Ray Kaskey depicting America's war years, at home and overseas. The unifying theme of the panels is the all-out mobilisation of America during the war and its transformation into the arsenal of democracy. Most of the panels are based on historical photos, their common element being the visual emphasis on the individual. The 12 panels on the north side depict the Atlantic front; those on the south the Pacific front. The Atlantic Front panels represent: Lend Lease, War Bond Drive, Women in the Military, Aircraft Construction/Rosie the Riveter, Battle of the Atlantic, Air War/B-17, Paratroopers, Normandy Beach Landing, Tanks in Combat, Medics in the Field, Battle of the Bulge, and Russians meet Americans at the Elbe. The Pacific Front panels represent: Pearl Harbor, Enlistment, Embarkation, Shipbuilding, Agriculture, Submarine Warfare, the Navy in Action, Amphibious Landing, Jungle Warfare, Field Burial, Liberation, and V-J Day.

For visitors walking along the pathways between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, curvilinear ramps at the north and south end of the memorial provide alternative access to the central plaza.

Twenty-four bronze bas-relief panels by sculptor Ray Kaskey illustrate key aspects of America's war years at home and overseas. *Above:* **Paratroopers hooked on ready to jump from a C-47 aircraft.** *Below:* **Link-up with the Soviet Army on the broken bridge at Torgau, April 25, 1945.**

In America, the gold star has for decades symbolised the loss of a loved one in war, 'Gold Star Mothers' displaying a gold-starred flag outside their homes in remembrance of their sacrifice. The state of Illinois now even issues gold star vehicle licence plates. (Blue Star Flags represent sons or husbands in the service.) Thus this symbolism has been carried through with the memorial's Freedom Wall with its 4,000 gold stars commemorating all Americans who gave their lives during the war. Each star is said to represent 100 dead, giving a total of 400,000. Official figures of American total battle deaths (including those who died while a prisoner of war and those missing in action presumed dead) as given in Michael Clodfelter's standard *Warfare and Armed Conflicts. A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures* (1992) only add up to 234,874, so we consulted Ted Darcy, the acknowledged expert on US casualties and missing (see *After the Battle* No. 122), who has just spent years building up a database of all US war dead, to see whether he could confirm the number of 400,000. Ted explains: 'The final count of our database is 356,690, but there is a problem with the figure as it does not include those lost in accidents within the United States. We have come up with source data to include them but that will take another year to input. Final total could easily exceed 400,000. Have to wait and see.'

Visitors entering the plaza pass two giant (43-foot-high) arched pavilions, one on the north and one on the south end. The northern pavilion represents the war in the Atlantic theatre (North Africa and Europe), the southern one the war in the Pacific. Inside each pavilion, four bronze columns support four American eagles, which together hold a suspended victory laurel. Inlaid on the floors are the WWII victory medal surrounded by the years '1941-1945' and the words 'Victory on Land', 'Victory at Sea', and 'Victory in the Air'. At the base of each pavilion on the plaza side is a semi-circular fountain sending water 30 feet into the air. Inscribed on the fountain copings are the battle honours of the US armed forces during the war, the southern one listing those in the China/Burma/India and Pacific theatres and the northern one those in the North African and European theatres.

Circling the plaza are 56 17-foot-high granite pillars, each one adorned with a bronze wreath and inscribed with a name, representing the 56 states and territories of the period and the District of Columbia. The pillars are connected by a bronze sculpted rope, the latter symbolising the unity of the nation during World War II.

At the centre of the sunken plaza is the reconstructed Rainbow Pool. Lowered and reduced in size by 15 per cent, it has been completely restored and provided with seating along its circumference. To enhance the aesthetic appearance of the water surface, the pool's vertical interior surfaces were fitted with an apron of black granite.

On the west side of the plaza, in what is named the commemorative area, stands the Freedom Wall. With the inscription 'Here we mark the price of Freedom', a field of 4,000 sculpted gold stars on this wall commemorates the 400,000 Americans who gave their lives during the war (the gold star was the symbol displayed by families who had lost relatives).

Inscribed at various places on the walls of the memorial are famous quotes illustrating landmark events of the war. From the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt after Pearl Harbor — 'December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy. . . No matter how long it will take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory' — to General Eisenhower's statement to the troops on the eve of D-Day in Normandy: ' You are about to embark upon the great crusade toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. . . I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle.'

The 'Germanic' appearance of the memorial with its Albert Speer-style granite columns, bronze wreaths, triumphal arches, eagles and floodlights has already been strongly criticised, one veteran even going as far as declaring: 'It looks like Hitler won the war'. Its extreme size — over seven acres — and over-the-top embellishments contrast badly with the dramatic Korean War Memorial nearby *(left)* and the classic Marine Corps Monument *(right)*, just over the Potomac river, based on Joe Rosenthal's famous Iwo Jima photo. War memorials should create an atmosphere of reverence for the deeds commemorated yet it has been said that the extravagance of the WWII Memorial, which intrudes on the previously graceful and historic setting between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, conveys only a brash reminder of Nazi Germany.

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